



# Pica In Children And Its Homoeopathic Management

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## Abstract

Pica is a behavioral and nutritional disorder characterized by persistent ingestion of non-nutritive and non-food substances such as soil, chalk, paper, clay, hair, or plaster for a period of at least one month at an age where such behavior is developmentally inappropriate. It is commonly observed among children between 2–12 years of age, particularly in developing countries where malnutrition and iron deficiency anemia are prevalent. If untreated, pica may lead to complications such as intestinal obstruction, parasitic infections, heavy metal toxicity, and growth retardation.

Homoeopathy, based on the principle of individualization, offers a holistic approach in the management of pica by addressing both the physical and psychological aspects of the disorder. This article reviews the etiology, clinical features, complications, diagnosis, and homoeopathic management of pica in children.

**Key words:** Pica, Children, Iron Deficiency, Nutritional Disorder, Homoeopathy.

## Introduction

Pica is derived from the Latin word “pica”, meaning magpie, a bird known for indiscriminate eating habits. The condition is defined as persistent eating of non-nutritive substances for at least one month in an individual whose developmental stage does not justify such behavior.

In children below two years of age, mouthing objects is considered normal; however, beyond this age, persistent ingestion of substances such as मिट्टी (soil), chalk, paper, clay, wall plaster, hair, or ice becomes pathological.

The prevalence of pica is higher in developing countries due to malnutrition, poverty, and poor hygiene. Studies suggest that iron deficiency anemia is strongly associated with pica behavior.

## Etiology

The exact cause of pica is multifactorial. The important contributing factors include:

- **Nutritional deficiencies**
  - Iron deficiency
  - Zinc deficiency
  - Calcium deficiency

- **Psychological factors**
  - Emotional deprivation
  - Parental neglect
  - Stress or anxiety
- **Socio-economic factors**
  - Poverty
  - Poor hygiene
  - Rural background
- **Developmental disorders**
  - Autism spectrum disorder
  - Intellectual disability

### Types of Pica

- Pica is classified based on the substance consumed:
- Geophagia – eating soil or clay
- Pagophagia – eating ice
- Trichophagia – eating hair
- Amylophagia – eating starch
- Plumbophagia – eating lead-containing substances

Among children in India, geophagia is the most commonly observed type.

### Clinical Features

- Common clinical manifestations include:
- Craving for soil, chalk, plaster, or paper
- Pallor due to anemia
- Abdominal pain
- Constipation or diarrhea
- Worm infestation
- Irritability
- Poor appetite for regular food
- Delayed growth

In severe cases, complications such as intestinal obstruction or heavy metal toxicity may occur.

### Diagnosis

- Diagnosis is primarily clinical and based on history.
- Investigations may include:
- Complete blood count (to detect anemia)
- Serum iron and ferritin levels
- Stool examination for ova and parasites
- Blood lead levels (if suspected)

### Complications

If left untreated, pica may lead to:

- Iron deficiency anemia
- Intestinal parasitic infections
- Dental injury
- Lead poisoning

- Intestinal obstruction
- Growth retardation

Early intervention is essential to prevent these complications.

### General Management

- Conventional management includes:
- Correction of iron deficiency
- Nutritional counseling
- Deworming
- Behavioral therapy
- Parental education

However, recurrence is common if underlying susceptibility is not addressed.

### Homoeopathic Management

Homoeopathy treats pica based on the principle of individualization and totality of symptoms. Constitutional remedies not only reduce abnormal cravings but also improve general health and nutritional status.

Important remedies frequently indicated in pica include:

1. Calcarea Carbonica
  - a. Craving for chalk, coal, eggshells
  - b. Fat, flabby children
  - c. Delayed milestones
  - d. Profuse perspiration on head
2. Cina
  - a. Worm infestation
  - b. Irritable, cross children
  - c. Grinding of teeth
  - d. Picking nose
3. Alumina
  - a. Desire to eat chalk, charcoal, dry substances
  - b. Constipation without urge
  - c. Sluggish temperament
4. Silicea
  - a. Desire for indigestible things
  - b. Delicate, weak children
  - c. Delayed development
5. Tarentula Hispana
  - a. Marked restlessness
  - b. Destructive behaviour
  - c. Impulsive tendencies
6. Natrum Muriaticum
  - a. Anemia
  - b. Reserved, introverted children
  - c. Craving for salt

Remedy selection should be based on complete case taking, mental generals, physical generals, and miasmatic background.

## Miasmatic Consideration

Pica is commonly associated with psoric and tubercular miasm due to nutritional deficiency and hypersensitivity states. Chronic neglected cases may show syphilitic traits if destructive tendencies are present.

## Prognosis

The prognosis of pica is good when treated early. Nutritional correction along with constitutional homoeopathic treatment provides better long-term results. Early intervention prevents complications and recurrence.

## Conclusion

Pica is a common yet often neglected disorder in children, particularly in developing countries. It is strongly associated with nutritional deficiencies, especially iron deficiency anemia. If untreated, it can lead to serious complications.

Homoeopathy offers a safe, individualized, and holistic approach in managing pica by correcting the underlying susceptibility and improving general health. Proper case taking, constitutional prescribing, and parental counseling play a crucial role in successful management.

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