

BLACK IS BEAUTIFUL

Many Indians are crazy about fair skin and go to extreme lengths to achieve and maintain a fair complexion. The media bombards you daily with very catchy advertisements of creams, lotions, sunscreens and other unscientific products that claim to make your skin fairer. Do you know that your skin colour is darker for very good evolutionary and biological reasons and that medically speaking, it is good that you do not have very fair skin? Darker skin is adapted to sunlight and has increased quantity of a pigment called melanin. The more melanin you have, the darker your skin. And the safer you are! Melanin along with other factors, acts as a “natural umbrella” and prevents harmful radiation from entering your skin. These are just some of the reasons why black skin is safe and beautiful:

- You are less prone to sunburns: White skinned individuals often get painful, carrot-red or tomato-red inflamed sunburns on exposure to sunlight. Some individuals also get blistering sunburns requiring aggressive medical treatment to control the reaction. Your darker skin allows you to spend a much longer time on the beach and you probably have never ever experienced any blister due to sunlight.
- You do not experience photo-ageing: Fine and deep wrinkles, broken blood vessels on the nose and cheeks, freckles, age spots and rough scaly spots called keratosis are commonly seen in white skinned individuals with long term sun exposure. These set of changes are called photo-aging. Because of natural sun protection, your Indian skin remains has less wrinkles and is smoother, even when exposed to the same amount of sunlight.
- You are less prone to skin cancers: Without melanin, you can imagine white skin as a transparent covering, which allows harmful UV light to penetrate through into the lower layers of the skin. This radiation causes damage to the DNA and a few cells may mutate to cause skin cancers, some of which are deadly. You are lucky that your “natural umbrella” blocks UV light effectively and cells in different layers of the skin suffer much less damage compared to white-skinned individuals. However, don’t forget to see a dermatologist in case you see any new bump, or in case you see any change in (a) symmetry, border, color, diameter or evolution (ABCDE) of any existing mole on your skin.

However, on the flip side, since your skin is effective in shielding you from sunlight, you are also prone to Vitamin D deficiency. Sunlight is required for the production of Vitamin D and darker skinned individuals are more prone to this deficiency. Talk to your dermatologist about this possibility.

Sunscreens were developed to protect against sunburns and skin cancers and you probably do not need them as a routine, unless you work outdoors, on beaches or on mountains. Stay away from skin brightening creams, since many of them contain compounds which permanently damage your skin and organs. Make it a point to consult your dermatologist before putting any medication on your skin. Be proud and be happy that you have dark Indian skin.