

Dr.Mohan Thomas - Cosmetic Surgeon



Holi season: Warnings and recommendations

Read on to find out the adverse effect of Holi colours and to know their organic alternatives

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In the olden days colours were made of flowers, which were soothing to the skin and were full of medicinal properties. But today, synthetic colours have taken their place to adulterate the celebration, which is harmful to human beings and the environment too.

These synthetic colours are made up of heavy metals, greases, engine oils, powdered glass and pesticides, which have adverse effects on the skin and other body systems, and quite a few of them are carcinogenic agents too. Thus, rather than being a hallmark of joy we are making Holi a festival of unhealthy memories.

Here is a brief account of some of these synthetic colours and their hazards to human health.



Red (*gulal*): The red colour signifies power. It has positive effects on the mind and body and increases enthusiasm, energy, confidence and gives a sense of protection from fear and anxiety.

Mercury sulphite is a main component of the synthetic red colour, which can cause irritation to the skin, allergies, Minamata disease, which leads to mental retardation, paralysis and impairment of vision. It is also a well established carcinogen and leads to skin cancer.

Gulal, the most commonly used form of red colour in various festivals, is basically mercury sulphite and powdered glass. Powdered glass gives shininess to *gulal*, which also causes minute skin abrasions and helps penetration of colour into the layers of the skin, giving a tattooing effect.

Green: The colour green denotes balance, harmony and stability. It signifies

growth, renewal and health. Copper sulphate is the main component of this synthetic green colour. It is a chemical used in pesticides and water treatment plants. It is toxic to human beings and usually causes irritation of eyes and skin and sometimes temporary blindness.

Black: The main constituent is lead oxide, which is well known for its adverse effects on the kidney as well as the central nervous system. Lead poisoning has disastrous effects on children especially the very young ones.

Silver: The colour silver represents wealth and accomplishment. Aluminium bromide, which gives the silver colour, is an irritant to the skin, eyes and respiratory system.

Purple: It symbolizes royalty and is associated with both nobility and spirituality. Chromium iodide is a main component of synthetic purple colour. It causes skin allergies such as rashes, nausea, cough, and asthma as well as one of the causative agents of lung cancer.

Hence, we should encourage the use of organic and homemade colours, which are time tested and have beneficial effects on the skin and health. Here are some colours, which can be organically obtained.

- Yellow can be made from turmeric (*haldi*) and gram flour (*besan*), *multani mitti* (fuller's earth). Also marigold (*gajinda*) or yellow chrysanthemums can be dried and crushed to fine powder to form this colour.
- Red is prepared from red sandalwood powder, which is good for the skin. Red hibiscus flowers are also used to prepare the colour red.
- *Tesu* flower also known as the flame of forest can be boiled or soaked overnight to obtain a nice smelling orange colour. Also these flowers can be crushed to form a powder and can be mixed to sandalwood powder. It smells great and is smooth to touch.
- Henna powder (*mehendi*) and the leaves of gulmohar can be dried and powdered to attain a fine green colour. Tender leaves of the wheat plant can be crushed to get green colour as well.
- Beetroot slices can be soaked overnight in water or boiled for a few minutes to make pink colour.
- Gooseberries (fruits of *amla*) can be used to make black colour. First boil them and then dilute it with water to get shades of black. It is also known to be a good conditioner.

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