

Beauty Trend: The Dangers of Skin Bleaching



By [Katie Sotack](#)

Every year thousands of women of color fall prey to the dangers of skin bleaching. Popular in countries with booming industries, like the Philippines, women, and [celebrities](#) spend stacks of cash to receive IV treatments known as the 'Cinderella Drip'. Yet not all skin lighteners are lucky enough to afford the IV, which whitens the skin from the inside out and has yet to be approved by the FDA. Many consumers purchase cheaper, over the counter beauty creams, containing poisonous chemicals like mercury. Long known to be toxic to humans since the haters went mad from exposure, mercury is used in these products as a skin lightening agent that reduces the production of melanin, and all for the sake of a [beauty trend](#).

This dangerous [beauty](#) trend has some terrifying side effects. So why do people continue to use the creams and what potential harm lies beneath?

Skin bleaching is a dangerous game. The FDA hasn't verified the products as safe and, for the most part, they are not in the United States. However, some cultures value fair-skinned individuals and can cause women of color to reach for these creams without remorse. Here are the facts behind skin lightening:

1. Translucent, easily bruised skin: The user's skin becomes almost translucent and the slightest touch can leave a bruise that takes ages to heal. A long-time user of skin lightening creams confessed these effects to the *New York Times* who sought out a specialist. Specializing in people of color's skin, the dermatologist they found in Brooklyn said that doctors in their practice saw cases like this at least once a week.

2. Elevated social standing: In countries like the Philippines skin lightening is sold as a way to elevate one's social standing. The fairer the skin the more well-off one appears. Historically, countries with higher uses of lightening creams and pills have perceived lighter skin as not only beautiful but powerful. This concept runs rapid in western societies as well where the treatment is popularized through the media. American sociologists produced studies which suggest the lighter skin tone a person has within their ethnic group, the more privilege they receive from society as a whole due to lighter skin people appearing to be of a higher class.

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3. Rashes: Many users have developed large red patches all over their bodies from the cream. The result appears to be like lesions with crusty looking rings around the rash spots. This reaction is a sign of mercury poisoning from the lightening creams. Symptoms also include vision impairment, fetal development issues, pins and needles, and loss of cognitive functions.

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4. Understanding the reasoning: When addressing the issue you may be tempted to call a participant crazy for risking their health for beauty. However, keep in mind that every culture has individuals who perform dangerous tasks to achieve their

society's ultimate beauty standards. In the 16th century Europe, women began wearing corsets which reduced oxygen intake and caused fainting. Today Iran leads the world in rhinoplasty with 200,000 Iranians a year undergoing this procedure which entails a nose splint, swelling, and eye bruises for weeks if all goes right. Similarly to skin lightening for women of color, we find white women and men in America sitting in beds of ultra-violet light likely to cause cancers for a glorious, status soaring tan. The warning: approach cultural [beauty tricks](#) and standards with empathy and care.

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5. Lighteners are imported and smuggled in: Most over the counter lightening creams and products should be banned for their excessively high levels of mercury. For example, in a *Refinery29* video, reporter Lexy Lebsack found that one small jar of skin lightening cream contained forty-two thousand times as much mercury as the legal limit in the Philippines. However, these products are still sold in corner stores every day to thousands of women looking to lighten their skin tone, not knowing the danger that lurks beneath the lid.

What is your take on skin lightening? Share in the comments below