

## Mail Today

### BY MANU MOUDGIL

**H**OLI IS an opportunity to go wild. Smearing colour on each other, getting drenched, eating tons of mithai and getting high on bhang are some of the highlights of this event. But keep in mind that there is a downside to this exuberance. Skin allergies, respiratory problems and corneal problems are common repercussions. Relentless eating and drinking is also likely to unsettle our tummies. Here we inform you on how to protect yourself even as you go wild.

#### Use Vaseline to save your skin

Colour is the essence of Holi. What most don't realize, however, is the extent to which colour seeps into your skin and hair. Even worse, the skin-friendly natural colours of yesteryears have been taken over by synthetic dyes with toxic effects.

Colours are laden with chemicals and heavy metals. Asbestos, silica, mica, ground glass, along with the acids, alkalis and heavy metals contained in colours cause allergic reactions that manifest as itching, redness and inflammation of the skin. "It only takes five minutes for the skin to react each time it comes into contact with these colours. In some there is immediate redness and itchiness, whereas others take longer," says Dr Sachin Dhawan, consultant dermatologist with Artemis Health Institute. One also runs the risks of getting dry skin and pigmentation since some colours are photosensitive. When they come in contact with sunlight, the skin burns. This leaves deep pigmentation, which in rare instances can even lead to skin cancer.

Washing and scrubbing the skin to get the colours off leads to a more severe problem. "People tend to use soaps to remove colours quite frequently during the day. Soaps contain esters that erode the skin layers and often cause a rash," says Dr Anil Malik, consultant dermatologist, Sitaram Bhartiya Institute of Science and Research. He advises everyone to wash once or twice and use a soap-free cleanser instead of soap and apply a water-based moisturiser.

The best way to protect your skin from the impact of colour is to apply coconut oil or petroleum jelly like vaseline an hour before you start playing. These act as a barrier against the colours by blocking the skin pores. Also use sun screen cream post washing since the dyes present in colours makes the skin more vulnerable to sun burns, darkening and rashes.

#### Protect your hair and nails too

The same rule applies to your hair, which also absorbs colour in the roots and becomes weak and brittle. To prevent this, use baby oil or coconut oil. These oils are low in chemical components and thus are mild on the scalp. Just like soap, don't overdo the shampoo since it may lead to hair fall.

Colour lodged in the nails is hard to deal with. It binds with the skin under the nail and you can end up with pink or green-coloured nails. Here again the best bet is to use petroleum jelly to prevent this. And also avoid a pedicure or manicure for a day or so. "These treatments can either damage the nail or the cuticle, which is a covering between the skin and the nail. This way if the colour is lodged inside, it would be pushed deeper," says Dr Dhawan. Don't use nailpolish remover to get the colour off either as it dissolves the protective skin layer making it thinner and more prone to allergies.

#### Use lenses to protect your eyes

Any foreign body entering the eyes causes irritation. Holi colours are full of harmful compounds.

While green colour has copper sulfate that causes eye allergy and affects sight, silver has aluminium bromide which causes cancer. Asbestos and silica are hazardous to the eyes resulting in chemical conjunctivitis, corneal abrasions and chemical burns.

"Colour can also stick to inner surface of upper eyelid, and would need mechanical removal by a doctor. It's better to use contact lenses since they would protect the cornea from any damage. Use disposable lenses since the lenses will absorb colours and hence turn use-less afterwards," advises Dr Umesh Bhatia, consultant ophthalmologist with Sitaram Bhartiya Institute of Science and Research.

#### Avoid respiratory distress

Holi is a difficult time for people with allergies and respiratory problems as there is plenty of pollen in the air. "Dry colours may contain fine dust causing acute spasms and wheezing. It's better to cover your nose and mouth with

wet cloth so that you don't inhale the colours by any chance," says Dr Nevin Kishore, senior chest consultant, Max Hospital. Those prone to such problems should carry their inhalers with them to prevent a full blown chest and lung attack.

#### Go for the Gujia

Bunge eating is the order of this day! Besides colours, Holi is also known for its food. *Gujia* - a traditional sweet made of *maida* and *khoya*, is a festival favourite along with other sweets and deep fried food. Experts say that indulging ourselves for a day is permissible. "You can't be on a restrictive

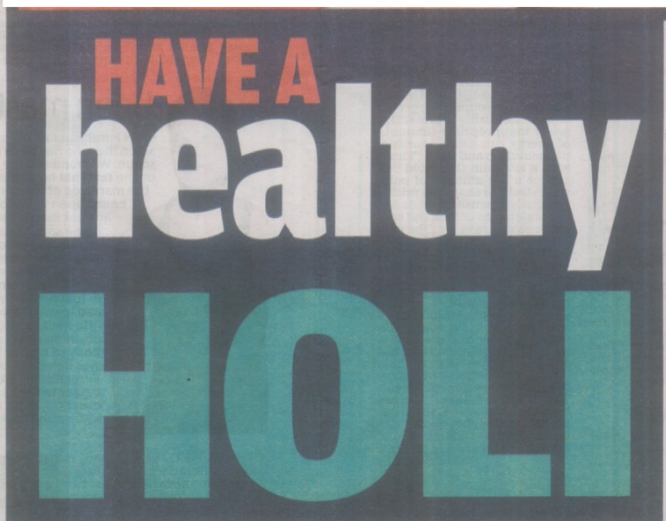
diet all the time. You can shift to lighter food after Holi. Stick to home-made food for 4-5 days and include juices in your diet which would act as cleansers to wash away the toxins," says Geetika Ahluwalia, chief dietician with Delhi Heart and Lung Institute.

Drinks prepared with *bhanga* are an another essential part of Holi. *Bhanga* is prepared from cannabis, which is also the source for marijuana. But since it involves a different processing, *bhanga* is not as dangerous and addictive as the narcotic. However, it creates a similar feeling of well being and calmness of the nervous system.

The physical impact of *bhanga* varies from person to person. It leads to dry-

ness in the mouth and elation. While most feel high after its consumption, others may feel nauseous or even faint. Blurring of vision, excessive sweating, rapid heartbeat, vomiting and loss of consciousness are other effects. "Mostly, the symptoms are self limiting and person returns to normal in 6-8 hours. No medicine can help and the best solution is to drink a lot of lemonade, fruit juice and water," says Dr Hareesh Sidhwa, consultant internal medicine, Fortis Hospital. In the rare instance of an emergency, doctors usually flush out the toxins from the stomach and help a person rehydrate his system.

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## NATURAL COLOURS ARE THE BEST

Opting for natural colours over the synthetic ones is the ideal solution for those who want to play a safe Holi. These herbal colours can even be prepared at home:

**MAKE GULAL AT HOME** by mixing red sandalwood powder with a bit of *malda* or *atta*. You can also boll the red sandalwood powder with water to make red coloured water.

Mix *haldi* and *besan* (gram flour) to get a bright yellow powder.

Mix the paste of green leafy vegetables in water to make green-coloured water.

Plain henna powder mixed in water will give you a vibrant orange colour.

Mix henna powder containing amla in water for a bright brown colour.