

‘Tanmaxxing’ is Proof That Gen Z is Getting Burnt By Viral Beauty Trends

The viral tanning trend exposing the dangerous side of algorithm-driven beauty.



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(Image credit: The Vault)

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An increasingly familiar scene is playing out on TikTok: a 20-something girl slathers her body in tan-accelerating oil, then lies out in peak sun. Next, the camera zooms in on her walnut-coloured tan and the stark outline of her bikini straps. What follows are remarks about the UV Index. “As soon as that UV Index starts hitting six and up, this is where I’m at,” says one TikToker, reclining on her sun lounger, a tub of Carroten in shot. “I’m roasting, and I love it; I love every minute of it. I have my little book with me, I’ve got my tanning gel, I’ve got my water, my phone’s on do not disturb. Life is good, man.” While another boasts, “A little burn goes a long way.” Welcome to Gen Z’s disturbing new world of ‘tanmaxxing’.

As the name suggests, the viral trend is all about maximising your deepest, darkest tan. It encourages you to use the UV Index, which measures the intensity of the sun’s rays, to find times when the risk of burning is highest. Some devotees are taking the trend even further by turning to Melanotan, an unlicensed synthetic peptide that mimics the hormone that stimulates melanin production. Marketed as a shortcut to a deeper tan with less sun exposure, it carries significant health risks and has been linked to the darkening of existing moles, the appearance of new moles and freckles, and other changes in skin pigmentation.

There’s an outcry from doctors and dermatologists, who call the trend “extremely dangerous”. The premise of tanmaxxing is, after all, to shun SPF in favour of deliberately exposing the skin to UV rays at their most powerful. “A tan is essentially your skin responding to injury,” says Dr Ahmed El Muntasar, a GP and aesthetics doctor. “When your skin is exposed to ultraviolet light, it produces more melanin (the pigment that gives skin its colour) in an attempt to protect the DNA within skin cells from further damage.”

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