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TV PERSONALITY and actress Khanyi Mbau has done it. So has her friend, kwaito star Nomasonto “Mshoza” Maswanganyi. Global stars Beyoncé and Rihanna are suspected to have started the trend.

We’re talking about the latest craze in skin lightening, the intravenous glutathione/vitamin C drip.

Skin brightening is in vogue again, but this time it’s not about topical creams that can burn or blotch your skin and lead to a host of side-effects.

It’s about lightening your skin from the inside, with the active ingredients injected into your bloodstream via an IV drip.

In the past nine months, Mbau had 10 initial infusions and another five to “maintain” the results.

“After the first three infusions, I could already see a difference, and now I am two tones lighter. It’s awesome,” says Mbau.

What is glutathione, and how does this skin brightening treatment work?

“Glutathione is an extremely powerful antioxidant,” says Dr Maureen Allem, general practitioner and medical director at the Skin Renewal Clinic.

“A combination of glutathione delivered with vitamins, minerals and fluids hydrate the skin and reduce melanin production.”

Melanin is the pigment that gives our skin its colour, and it is produced by the activation of an enzyme called tyrosinase.

Glutathione binds to tyrosinase, which reportedly helps prevent the enzymatic pathways that produce melanin.

“Intravenous therapy is a breakthrough in skin brightening and cell defence.

“The treatment has become increasingly popular not only for lightening skin tone, but also for general well-being, because it is a very effective way to feed vitamins, minerals and antioxidants directly into the bloodstream.

“Nutrient absorption via food you eat is much less effective, because of gastrointestinal absorption, which can be affected by diseases such as gastritis, colitis, leaky gut syndrome, bacterial and/or fungal overgrowth and imbalance, stress and anxiety,” Allem explains.

The clinic that administers the skin brightening IV for Mbau is the Lightsculpt Aesthetic Clinic, which makes its own glutathione-based cocktail for the drip.

The treatment is gaining popularity in the African and Indian communities, says Allan White, managing director of Lightsculpt Aesthetic Clinic in Bedfordview, Joburg.

“We administer our own formula of glutathione, vitamin C and other vitamins and minerals, which was developed at a university in the US, and I believe we get the best results.

“The darker you are, the more radical the results.

“We have had Indian and African patients with very noticeable results, but only if they stick to the regimen of treatments recommended,” says White.

White says the ingredients in the clinic’s glutathione cocktail are approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and the treatment is “completely safe”.

However, the FDA has issued a warning against the excessive use of glutathione, saying it could cause kidney and liver problems.

“The alarming increase in the unapproved use of glutathione administered intravenously as a skin-whitening agent at very high doses is unsafe and may result in serious consequences to the health of users.

“When administered orally, it is hydrolysed by the gastric juices and further undergoes degradation by the liver enzyme, and the resultant bio-availability is low.

“Intravenous administration delivers very high doses directly into the systemic circulation and may overload the renal circulation,” FDA head Suzette Lazo said in 2011.

Joburg kidney specialist Dr Mahomed Asmal assures, however, that in people with healthy kidneys, excess glutathione is “simply expelled”.

“There is no real risk in a generally healthy person,” he says.

At the Skin Renewal Clinic and Lightsculpt Aesthetic Clinic, each patient undergoes a pre-infusion consultation with an in-house doctor to assess any health risks.

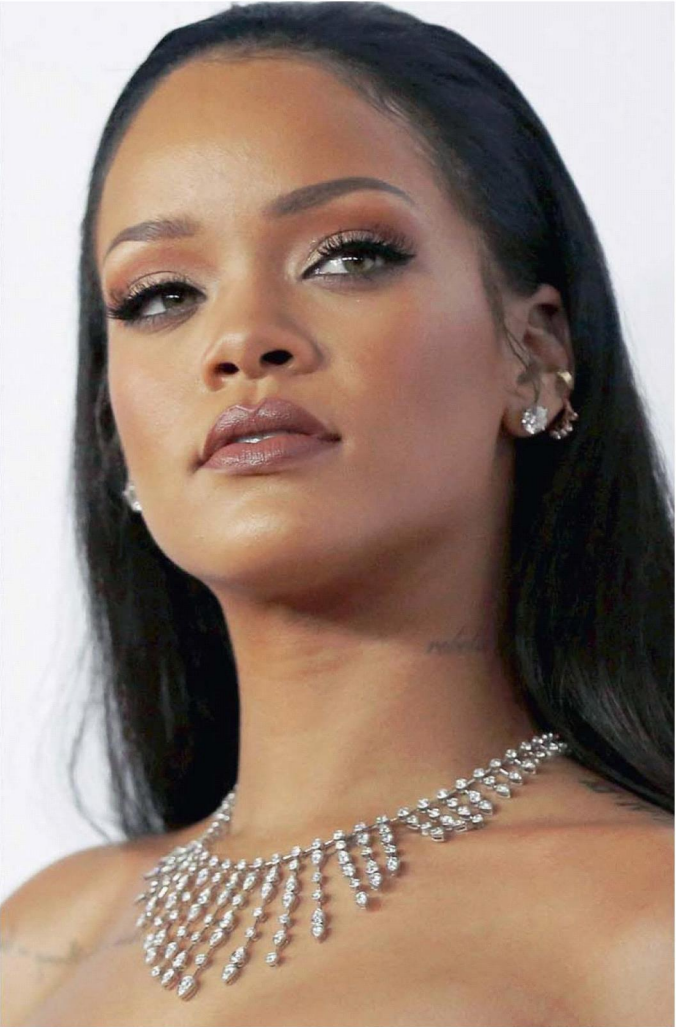
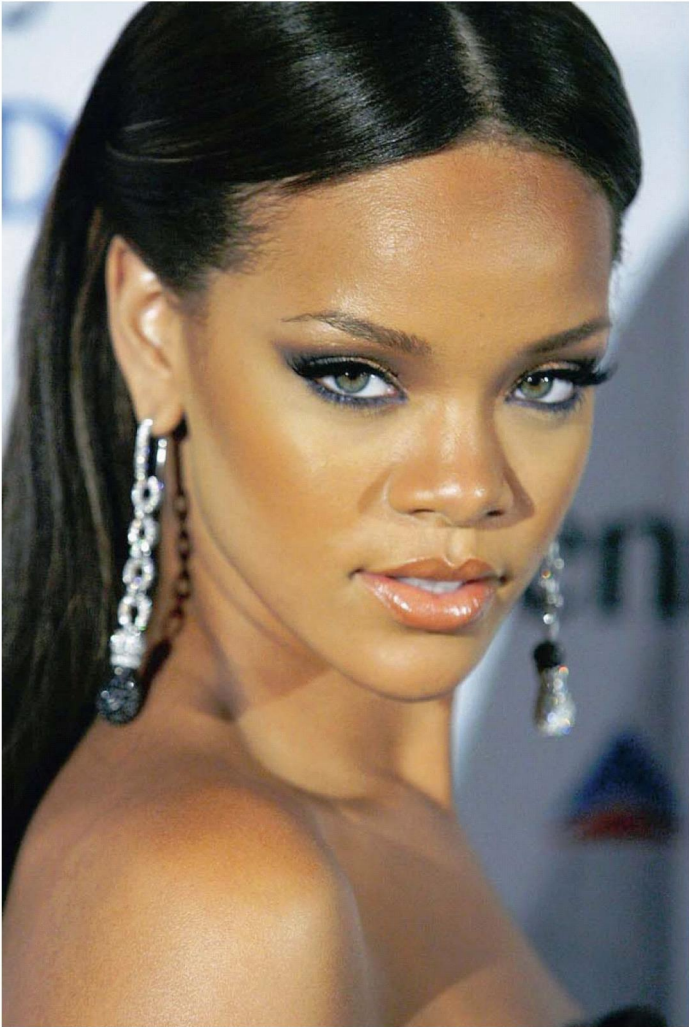
“Tests may need to be done to assess kidney function, which is necessary before any IV infusion.

“Follow-up tests may also be necessary to check the kidney function following certain infusions,” says Allem.

Suffice to say that, as in any treatment involving injections, you need to ensure you see a professional medical officer in a well-recognised beauty clinic if you want this treatment done.

There is a lack of published clinical trial evidence, meanwhile, that glutathione really works to lighten skin, although the anecdotal evidence is compelling.

Glutathione infusions for skin whiten-



MY BEST SIDE: It may just be different lighting, but Rihanna, above, and Beyoncé, below, have reportedly lightened their skin.

SA’s black celebrities see need to lighten up



Skin lightening by injecting the antioxidant glutathione into your bloodstream is latest rage, writes **Helen Grange**



FAIR MAIDENS? Lightsculpt Clinic posted on its website this picture of Nomasonto “Mshoza” Maswanganyi and Khanyi Mbau on intravenous drip of vitamins and the naturally occurring antioxidant glutathione (the so-called party drip).



WHITE IS ALRIGHT: Khanyi Mbau recently posted on her Instagram account ‘mbaureloaded’, showing how she has transformed.

ing have been used in China and Japan for decades, but it wasn’t until a few years ago when the skin lightening effects were observed in darker celebrities in the West that it really caught on.

Mbau says the treatment works “all over”: “From between my toes, my knuckles, the top of my head, even my bum crack... it’s all lighter.

“I’m a big believer, and it’s so much safer, with far superior results, than those damaging skin lightening lotions that so many women are buying on the black market. I do it for the wellness boost it

gives you as well,” she says.
That said, you need a chunk of time and money to achieve the desired effects of a glutathione-vitamin C drip.
“It is recommended to have IV infusions (lasting about one hour) twice a week in the first month, then they can be done weekly until your desired skin tone and results are achieved.
“After that, one session every month to maintain results is recommended,” says Allem. Depending on the weight of the patient, the cost at Skin Renewal varies between R660 and R1 600 per treatment. At LightSculpt it is R800 per treatment.
Not only that, your commitment has to be unwavering.
“If you miss a treatment, you won’t get the results you’re looking for.
“And if you spend just a minute in the sun, you’ll go darker again,” White said.
There is ongoing controversy over the desire by African women to lighten their skins in the first place.
The pro camp is undeniably strong – according to a UCT study, about 35 per cent of South African women are lightening their skin.
In black and Indian communities, women have said they do so because they believe darker skin improves their career and marital prospects.
Those against skin lightening say it is unAfrican and go so far as to label it a form of self-hatred.