

AGING GRACEFULLY: OXYMORON OR MANTRA?

This question is the crux of plastic surgery today. The battle against outward aging can be won on three fronts: lifestyle choices; non-invasive means; surgical procedures. Before subjecting yourself to non-invasive alternatives or going under the knife, it is important to understand how internal (inner body changes involving hormones, cells, fat and muscle composition, etc.) and external factors (environmental and life choices) can impact our looks over time.

We blossom during puberty and maintain tight skin, strong muscles and hard bones during our 20s. Starting in our 30s, we see gradual loss of facial volume and weakening of the corresponding support system designed to hold the soft, fleshy parts of the face firmly against facial bones. As we enter middle age, environmental influences begin to catch up with internal factors and aging seems to accelerate. As we progress in age, women begin to produce less estrogen, and men, less testosterone.

Taking preemptive measures by controlling external factors early in life is the first step towards aging gracefully. Just think **A-N-S-W-E-R** to remember the basics to making good lifestyle choices.

ALCOHOL and smoking are two of the biggest external factors that cause premature aging. Alcohol is a diuretic, which has a drying effect on the body; this can cause facial skin to become dry, flaky and deflated. Alcohol also depletes the body of vitamin A, causing a shallow, unhealthy appearance. Smoking speeds up skin aging by producing free radicals, which are highly unstable, powerful molecules that cause damage to DNA. The cells of the body begin behaving erratically, producing a range of cellular responses that make skin age fast.

NUTRITION is the cornerstone of aging well. Americans gain at least two pounds per year over their lifetime. That is about 100 calories each day. Therefore, if we burn off those 100 extra calories each day, or do not ingest them at all, we will not gain weight. Even more, eating the right foods is imperative. Look to the food pyramid for healthy eating guidance.

SUN avoidance is a no-brainer. Rays wreak havoc on skin cells. Using sunscreen on a daily basis is an effortless precautionary step anyone can take. Wearing a wide-brimmed hat and avoiding going out in mid-day sun, if possible, are two other easy measures by which we should all abide.

WATER comprises between 60 and 70 percent of the body, yet most people walk around chronically dehydrated. To figure out if you are drinking enough water, take your weight in pounds divided by two. The result is how many ounces of water you should drink daily. When drinking alcohol you should drink an equal amount of water to combat alcohol's diuretic effect.

EXERCISE is the key to keeping weight off as we age. It can be difficult to dedi-

cate thirty minutes to an hour a day three to five times a week to exercise. Exercising throughout the day is often easier than stressing about making time to go to the gym. So, think creatively and try to incorporate exercise into your daily routine. For example, leave the house a little early and walk instead of taking the subway. The average person walks at about three miles per hour; that is 60 north-south city blocks. Or, sit on an exercise ball at your desk instead of in a chair. This helps posture and the body's core.

RELAXATION ironically, can be one of the most difficult lifestyle choices to make. Mental chatter—thoughts about responsibilities swirling in the brain—can make it very difficult to sleep at night as the mind tries to make sense of it all. It also keeps us distracted from the world in front of us. As little as five minutes a day of mindful breathing can begin to reset the circuitry in the brain, making peace amongst all the chaos.

These six areas incorporated into daily life may be enough for you to go about your days with renewed energy and confidence. If not, you can visit downtownmagazinenyc.com for both non-invasive and invasive alternatives.

—Donald Roland, M.D.

Board Certified Plastic and Reconstructive Surgeon

Photography by Morgan Miller. Makeup and hair by Scott McMahan.

FOREHEAD

Gravity causes the forehead to lower, making the eyes seem smaller over time. The fat over the brow atrophies, giving a bony look. Forehead lines appear as a result of the millions of times the forehead muscles are flexed in expression.

EYELIDS

The skin on the eyelids is some of the thinnest on the body. Consequently, eyelids are the most vulnerable to the sun's effects. Lid support weakens and the protective fat that keeps the eyeballs cushioned begins to pop out. This, in conjunction with the muscle around the eye that causes blinking contracts 17,000 times a day (or 6.25 million times a year), eventually creating dreaded crow's feet.

CHEEKS and FOLDS

In youth, cheek fat is thick and sits high up beneath the lower lid. With time, the fat diminishes and the small ligaments supporting the fat stretch, revealing a flattened area next to the nasal bridge beneath the lid. Now, the bone is seen just beneath the skin. The whole area gives the appearance of tiredness.

Nasolabial folds—the lines connecting the nose to the corners of the mouths—are fixed to the many expression muscles just below. This acts as a sort of anatomic dam preventing cheek fat from passing through it. Instead, the fat tries to overflow, deepening the folds with age. The corners of the mouth begin to turn down as the cheeks descend and the lips thin from the atrophy of muscle and fat.

NECK

An aged neck can be caused by an assortment of factors. The same system of facial expression muscles on the face extend down the front of the neck. These are apparent when one sticks their neck out or forcefully turns down the corners of the mouth. As we age, these two muscles tend to separate right down the middle, leading to the inner edge of each falling away from the neck. This looks like two strings, or neck bands, under the skin. Excess fat and loose skin also tends to accumulate in the neck.

JOWLS

Jowls are simply cheeks going south. This combined with a gradual weight gain over the course of your lifetime can make it hard to see the nice chiseled jawbone you had in your high school yearbook.

SKIN

In most cultures, the skin of the face and hands is exposed on a daily basis to the sun's harmful effects. Ultraviolet rays damage skin cells, resulting in a roughened texture, increased wrinkles, loss of skin's snappiness and uneven pigment changes. This in turn adversely affects all other areas, because the skin is the fabric covering our facial architecture.

AGING Gracefully