

## **Fashion and Apparel Choices as We Age**

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It wasn't that long ago when societal standards deemed older men wear formal suits while older women were relegated to wearing dark blue, black, muted or dull colors. Clothes for older consumers were generally found to be conservative, plain and drab. Fortunately, the clothing style revolution of the 1960's had some measure of an effect on elder-apparel, and older people today have more choice and options in clothing. Clothing choice can also affect the way we feel: it gives one a degree of personal identity; it can certainly influence self-image, and it also provides us with a sense of comfort and security.

Whether you are seeking clothing for yourself, designing clothes for the older consumer, or assisting an older family member with clothing choices, it is important that you keep in mind certain identified principles that govern clothing selection throughout life. Fashion experts offer the following buying tips:

1. Professionals in gerontology agree that as we age, we become more "individualized." Fashion specialists concur that their "first rule of fashion advice" for older adults is to develop your own style, your own "look." Not only should your clothes feel good to wear, but they should flatter you. Real style is possible as you age.
2. As we grow older, our bodies are changing. Yes, the long arms you had at 21 will still be with you at 75; however, you may notice that your middle may be expanding (especially true for women after the onset of menopause). It happens slowly: the skin and hair begin to change; breasts begin to sag; shoulders tend to roll forward, height can decrease, knees can become enlarged, and weight can increase or decrease. America is aging and more people are living longer into their older years. The American Society for Testing and Materials (a group of scientists and statisticians) began measuring women in the 1990's to set new dress size standards. What looked good when you were 40 may not work when you are in your 60's. Tips: Try to avoid outfits or styles that draw the eye to your waistband if you've lost that hourglass shape. Change the tint or shade of your wardrobe color to flatter aging skin tones or changing hair color. If you are shopping for an older person, it might be a good idea to take their body measurements before you head to the mall.
3. Circulation tends to slow with age, and varicose veins and bulky calves can be other issues. Tight clothing and undergarments may further aggravate these conditions. Women should stay away from garters or girdles, as well as tight socks and stockings that roll down below the knee. Men should avoid the elastic top socks that squeeze at the calf since they can create circulation problems in the legs. It's a good idea to seek out pants with straight legs to accommodate swollen knees. Aside from not being comfortable, skin tight clothing does not necessarily flatter an older consumer, no matter their size.
4. Many seniors may have arthritis or other disabling conditions. It can be difficult to hold things or make small finger movements (buttoning a shirt), or difficult to dress because of stiffness, pain, or the inability to bend or raise your arms or legs. Buttons can be a problem, bra hooks can be annoying, and shoe laces become a dilemma. Luckily for us, Velcro was invented! If you can't find the style in ready-to-wear, a good seamstress or the local drycleaners can make

a quick alteration to your stylish wardrobe. Apparel is being designed with easier fasteners, but older consumers should not have to settle for bland styles. As the population ages, fashion designers & manufacturers hopefully won't stick to the cliché that Velcro equates to dowdy duds.

5. Clothing color becomes important as we grow older. Color consultants agree that there is a shade or tint of color that will flatter everyone. Many manufacturers are even adding colors to their lines that look good with gray and white hair (such as royal blue or deep purple tones). In order to find the right color for you, experts suggest spending a day color shopping. A fabric store could be the perfect place to start your color shop adventure, or you can just head straight to the mall. A recommendation is to choose a few colors that appeal to you, then stand in good light and put some fabric under your chin and look in the mirror. Is your eye immediately drawn to your face or to the color swatch of fabric? Does the color wash you out or make you look vibrant, bright and alive. The best color choice will be one that brings attention to you and your face and makes your skin glow.

Just remember, seniors can and should have style. Fashion consultants have found that some people do not find their real style until they are well along in age. The older we get, the better we are at knowing what we like and who we are or have become. Creating a special brand of style can be a great new adventure to look forward to as we do age.

#### **Resources:**

[Anti-Aging-Articles.com](http://Anti-Aging-Articles.com) has great articles about stylish clothes for older women, buying clothing for seniors, clothing for mobility issues, hairstyles, and more.

[The Encyclopedia of Aging and The Elderly](#) has information about clothing and more topics on aging

Explore other great websites, including [How to Buy Clothing for the Elderly](#) and [Clothes for the Elderly](#) and [Senior Living](#) for important consumer tips.

And don't forget that new ideas are always happening...thanks to our Apparel Design students and faculty. Check out great articles at: [The Cornell Chronicle Online](#), [International Journal of Consumer Studies](#), and [Sage Journal Online](#),