

The Anti-Aging Rx

What to do at 35, 45, 55, and beyond

by Barbara Loecher

Intro

How to age well? If only we could ask the naked mole rat.

A close cousin of the mouse, which lives a mere 2 or 3 years before succumbing to the ravages of aging, the naked mole rat is a longevity champ, living 25 years or more. Such mastery of the mortality game has made this unimposing rodent--less than 4 inches long and nearly bald--a darling of researchers. "We're studying animals like these in the hope that we'll learn more about how people can better manage aging," says Jill Carrington, PhD, of the National Institute on Aging's [Biology of Aging program](#).

What they're learning will change the way you think about how you age--and what you can do about it. Contrary to long-standing belief, living longer and healthier isn't simply a matter of having genes like those of a tortoise. "We now realize that heredity accounts for only about 30 percent of the difference in how well most people age," says Wojtek Chodzko-Zajko, PhD, professor and head of the department of kinesiology at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and chairman of the American College of Sports Medicine's [Active Aging Partnership](#).

Emerging research suggests that most of your susceptibility to wrinkles, flab, muscle loss, and chronic health problems such as [heart disease](#) and osteoporosis can be managed through exercise, diet, and even what you slather on your face. In a recent study of 250 Japanese women ages 20 to 70, those who exercised regularly were 5 years "younger"--as measured by greater muscle mass, better cardiovascular endurance, and increased flexibility--than their inactive counterparts. Other studies suggest that women who lift weights can slow age-related weight gain and belly fat accumulation.

"There are some women in my practice who look 20 years younger than they are," notes Richard Glogau, MD, a dermatologist and professor at the University of California, San Francisco. And it's not because they've appeared on *Extreme Makeover* either. It's because they do the right things to prevent sun damage, which causes about 85 percent of what used to be considered age-related skin changes. From Glogau and others at the anti-aging forefront, here's the latest on what you can do to look and feel younger--whether you're in your 30s, 40s, 50s, or beyond.

At 35

Your Face

You're probably just starting to see fine lines that bracket your mouth and radiate out from the corners of your eyes when you smile, talk, or squint. These early aging signs will only get more noticeable as your skin gets thinner, dryer, and less elastic over time. Sun exposure dramatically accelerates this decline, says Mark G. Rubin, MD, dermatologist and professor at the University of California, San Diego. In a way, that's good news, because you have the power to help your skin stay smooth and taut by practicing smart sun behavior and upgrading your products to reflect your skin's changing needs. Here's how:

Check sunscreen for the following ingredients:

Either titanium dioxide, zinc oxide, or Parsol 1789 should be on the label. If not, you won't get adequate UVA and UVB protection. The best way to wear it: Apply SPF 15 in the morning under makeup, as you would a moisturizer, and don't bother reapplying unless you exercise or shower during the day. If you plan to be out all day, boost your SPF to 45, says Glogau. Bonus: If you're traveling to Canada, Europe, or Australia, pick up sunscreen that contains mexoryl, a far superior sun blocker that is not yet available in the United States.

Squint-test your sunglasses.

The right shades can keep you from squinting in the sun, critical for staving off crow's-feet and forehead lines. Test pairs by trying them on and watching yourself in a mirror as you turn toward a bright light (a department store lamp will do). If you blink or squint, go for a bigger, darker, Jackie O-style lens. Note: Glasses labeled "100% UV protection" usually provide it even if they're the \$5 variety. "Manufacturers have come up with very inexpensive but effective coatings, so even cheap sunglasses will protect your skin and your eyes from too much sun," says Glogau.

Keep your hat on.

Wear a broad-brimmed hat if you're outside between dawn and dusk, especially in the spring and summer. You may be aware that shortwave ultraviolet light (UVB), which causes wrinkling and potentially cancerous skin changes, peaks between 10 am and 3 pm. But long-wave ultraviolet light (UVA), which turns out to be equally damaging, is unwaveringly intense until sundown. Only you need to know that your chic hat is protecting your face from wrinkles, roughness, blotches, and other hallmarks of aging. Everyone else will think it's a fashion statement.

Smooth on antioxidants.

Now is also an ideal time to trade up to more potent over-the-counter skin care creams (though you probably don't need the prescription-only ones yet). Studies show that those containing antioxidants such as vitamins C and E work best together to prevent skin-wrinkling cellular damage, premature aging of the skin, and precancerous growth.

Your Body

If you're over 35, it's time to pay attention to retaining your bone density and muscle mass. For every decade of inactivity after your 30s, you'll lose 10 percent of your muscle mass--more if you're inactive. You'll also gain fat and weight even if you don't change your eating habits, because calorie-hungry muscle burns more calories per pound than any other kind of tissue, explains Carla Sottovia, PhD, an exercise expert at the Cooper Fitness Center in Dallas. Now is the time to curb excess weight gain, which could boost your risk of health problems, including diabetes and heart disease, and could make you look and feel older. Try these new strategies for minimizing those risks:

Strength-train now for more payoff later.

Think it's an odd time to start pumping iron? No way, finds a small but dramatic study of 25 women. Those who started strength training before their 40s saw bigger gains in bone density--which may prevent osteoporosis--than those who started later. Twice-weekly strength, or resistance, training is also your ticket to building calorie-burning muscle. For something different, try "cable system" resistance equipment--such as the FreeMotion line--at a gym near you. These devices let you move in more varied ways, making workouts less tedious, promises Jan Griscom, a personal trainer at Chelsea Piers fitness center in New York City.

Jump.

In your 30s, take advantage of the fact that your joints can still handle high-intensity aerobic exercises such as jumping rope and jogging. A recent study finds this kind of heart-pounding workout can actually slow the buildup of plaque in your arteries; the more intense the aerobics, the more marked the slowdown. Weight-bearing aerobic exercises such as jumping rope do triple duty, helping you maintain strong bones and clean arteries while you burn calories, says Robert Mazzeo, PhD, professor of integrative physiology at the University of Colorado. Whatever aerobic regimen you choose, aim for 30 to 60 minutes at a sweat-breaking pace four or five times a week, suggests Sottovia.

Stay energized with quality fat.

You probably know that a moderate-fat diet (about 30%) is more likely to help you drop and keep off excess pounds than a low-fat one, and that nuts, fish, and avocados are great sources of heart-healthy fats. But--surprise!--you could benefit even more than your husband from adding fats to your diet, especially as you boost your exercise. "Women are better fat metabolizers than men," says Peter J. Horvath, PhD, associate professor in the department of exercise and nutrition sciences at the State University of New York at Buffalo, who found that adding peanuts to the diets of female athletes boosted their endurance and improved performance.

Another tip: Skip nut oils or butters, and nibble on a handful of almonds or walnuts (about 200 calories), suggests Paul A. Davis, a research nutritionist at the University of California, Davis, who likens nuts to time-release capsules because they slowly parcel out their good fat in a more healthful manner.

Take a multi and calcium.

Now is the time to take a calcium supplement in addition to your multivitamin. The reason: You won't find a multi with the whopping 1,000 mg of calcium you need in your 30s--it would be too big to swallow.

At 45

Your Face

Lines that once reflected joy and sorrow are now part of your skin's permanent landscape. You may also start noticing age spots, discolored blotches caused by excessive sun. Though your career and family life may be in overdrive, find time to take care of yourself with these simple tips:

Guard against sun, indoors and out.

Glass windows filter out UVB light but not UVA. So even if work keeps you in the car or office from sunup to sundown, start wearing makeup or moisturizer that packs SPF 15 every day, and make it a lifelong habit--starting now. Need

convincing? Scott W. Fosko, MD, chairman of dermatology at Saint Louis University School of Medicine, sees more precancerous skin lesions on the left side of his patients' faces and foreheads than on the right side because of sun exposure through car windows.

Up the skin care ante.

Now that you're older, you need stronger stuff, says Rubin. See a dermatologist for a prescription-strength vitamin A derivative--either Retin A, Renova, or the newer Tazorac. Studies show that these products can make those wrinkles less noticeable and fade age spots, and they may even prevent certain precancerous changes in your skin. In-office procedures such as microdermabrasion and chemical peeling can help with lines beyond the reach of creams, says Glogau. While you're visiting the dermatologist, remember to have her check discolored spots, moles, or other skin growths for any precancerous changes.

Your Body

Almost half of all Americans your age are members of the so-called Sandwich Generation: with aging parents or in-laws as well as children under 21. Add to that the demands of a career, a spouse, and volunteer work, and you're likely to tell yourself, I'm too busy to exercise and eat right. But there are no good excuses for skipping exercise or eating poorly. By this time, you may have lost enough muscle to have slowed your metabolism, which means weight gain and heart trouble are real risks. Take action without delay with these strategies:

Combine and conquer.

Sign up for a circuit-training or new "integrated-training" class. Offered at Curves and other health clubs, these combine aerobics with muscle- and bone-building strength training in a single, highly efficient session. Or eliminate your gym commute and combine family and workout time by walking, bicycling, or working out to exercise videos at home with your partner and kids.

Make your own fast food.

Take advantage of the proliferation of calorie-controlled prepared and semiprepared foods in the supermarket. For breakfast, eat whole grain cereal with low-fat milk and fresh fruit. For lunch, have fat-free deli meat such as Healthy Choice oven-roasted chicken or turkey breast on whole grain bread, a prewashed, bagged salad, and fresh fruit. Snack on prewashed baby carrots and nonfat prepackaged dip. For dinner, grill wild Alaskan salmon, microwave a potato, and steam a bag of frozen vegetables. Quick tip: Make an extra serving of dinner, then take the leftovers to work for a healthy lunch the next day.

At 55+

Your Face

After 55, you may glance in the mirror and wonder, Who is this woman with such deep expression lines and dark age spots? Your eyebrows may ride lower on your brow, the skin on your eyelids may appear bunched, and you might begin to look a bit jowly. Over time, your hair may thin. But a slew of new, less-invasive, quick-recovery treatments at your dermatologist's office can help you turn back time--almost.

Consider professional help.

Chemical peels and laser resurfacing can make wrinkles and pigmentation changes a lot less noticeable. Dermatologists and cosmetic surgeons offer other non- or minimally invasive solutions, such as Thermage, for crow's-feet, drooping eyebrows, and jiggly jawlines.

Get your hair done at the doc's.

Thanks to a postmenopausal drop in estrogen production, the hair on your head may begin to thin--even as you start to notice more hair on your face. Minoxidil (marketed as Rogaine) and hair transplants are options for the former. Laser hair removal and topical creams that suppress facial hair growth can help with the latter, says Glogau. But you may not need those, because some very treatable medical conditions, including thyroid problems, can cause unwanted hair loss and growth. So check with your doctor first.

Your Body

From your mid-50s onward, age-related changes can make you lose muscle and gain weight more easily, especially if you're inactive. As a result of declining estrogen levels, you may find your new fat accumulating around your waist, not your hips.

Bad news, since research finds that apple-shaped women are at greater risk of heart disease than "pears" are. Hormonal changes can also make you lose bone faster, upping your odds of getting osteoporosis, dowager's hump, and even fractures. You could be at risk far sooner than you think: In a 2003 study of nearly 90,000 women ages 50 to 64, almost one-third had bone density low enough to run an increased risk of fracture. The same strategies that helped you stay youthful earlier in life still work now. Without further delay:

See your MD on the way to the gym.

The benefits of exercise at this age are indisputable. A recent year long study of 173 inactive and overweight women ages 50 to 75 found that those who began exercising for 45 minutes 5 days a week lost 4% of their total body fat and reduced hard-to-shed belly fat. Another study tracking 140 women ages 44 to 66 found that those who enrolled in a 1-year strength-training program boosted their bone density.

But, experts say, you must make a pit stop at the doctor before you get moving. "You'll need your doctor's okay if you're going to start exercising in your 50s after a hiatus of several years, since you may have hidden heart problems, diabetes, and that sort of thing," says Sottovia. If you've been cleared to exercise but have osteoporosis or heart disease, consider working with a trainer--at least at the beginning. Look for one who has experience with clients with similar health histories. Expect to pay \$70 to \$85 an hour in big cities, somewhat less elsewhere.

Go for the silver.

Check your local health club or Y for programs designed for exercisers 55 and older. Now offered at many Ys, Silver Sneakers classes combine strength and aerobic exercises that are kind to more sensitive joints and bones. Another aerobic option: Buy a gentle-on-joints elliptical workout machine. The *Prevention*-tested and approved ProForm 900 costs \$500.

Loosen your grip.

For strength training, choose machines over free weights, says Mazzeo. "With free weights, you have to grip harder, and that can drive up blood pressure--a problem if you have high blood pressure," he explains.

Add even more calcium.

Choose a multivitamin formulated for older women. It should include a smaller dose of iron--you need less if you're no longer menstruating--but extra calcium (you'll now need 1,500 mg) and at least the Daily Value of B12 (6 mcg) and vitamin D (400 IU), which your body needs in higher doses.

Barbara Loecher is a senior editor for *Prevention*.