

BEAUTY IN OLDER AGE:

**ADDRESSING
GROOMING CHANGES
THROUGHOUT THE
LIFESPAN**



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Beauty in Older Age

It's no secret that our bodies undergo many changes as we age. We often make changes to our diet to keep us healthy internally, but what about the external health of our bodies? Throughout the life span, both men and women engage in various beauty related routines in order to keep their hair, skin, and nails healthy. However, as we begin to undergo physical change as a normal part of the aging process, some of those grooming routines may need to undergo some changes as well. This blog post is going to explain how these changes occur, and what we can do to better manage our 'new' bodies.

About the Author

Hello, my name is Alyssa Ouellette and I am an occupational therapy student at Wayne State University. I have always had a passion for working with older adults, as well as a strong interest in all things hair, skin, and nails related. Today, I aimed to combine these two interests in order to bring you information on how you can best take care of these things as you age. I hope you find this post helpful and found some tips/tricks that can help your hair, skin, and nails remain healthy!



How Do These Changes Occur?

As we age, our hair undergoes changes in color, growth, and distribution (Barney & Perkinson, 2016). By the age of 50, half of the average person's hair has grayed from running out of the pigment cells that give hair its color (Gawande, 2007). The whiter/lighter colored hair that results makes hair more susceptible to UV damage that can cause hair damage and scalp irritation (Monselise et al., 2017). When we are in our mid 30's, our hair density begins to decrease resulting from age related hair loss conditions, and our scalps reduced sebum production often results in hair/scalp dryness (Ahluwali & Fabi, 2019). However, all of these changes can also be exacerbated by various things we are exposing ourselves to in the environment such as humidity, stress, and various chemicals like air pollution, smoking, or hair dye (Ahluwali & Fabi, 2019). All of these changes in our hair present various challenges to the health of our hair and scalp that can be addressed in many different ways if they have begun to pose a problem to you.

At Home Treatment Approaches:

- Prevent further UV damage to the hair/scalp, by wearing a hat/scarf outside or using hair products with sunscreen additives
- Stop smoking or limit time spent around smoke to decrease exposure to its adverse effects on hair growth and texture
- Changes to grooming habits (Monselise et al., 2017):
 - Decrease shampoo frequency: daily shampooing strips the hair of its protective sebum covering, drying out the hair and causing breakage
 - Use a milder shampoo that is less irritating and more suitable for frequent use such as baby shampoo
 - Comb hair when dry and with a wide tooth comb in order to prevent breakage from brushing wet hair with small bristles
 - Limit the amount of chemical and heat styling done to your hair to prevent further damage/breakage
 - Use moisturizing treatments to your hair/scalp to keep them healthy



How Do These Changes Occur?

Many of the same extrinsic factors that cause age-related damage to hair have a similar effect on our skin as well. Age-related skin changes include things like dryness, roughness, dilated blood vessels, and wrinkles (Manríquez et al., 2014). These changes to our skin are caused by intrinsic factors of aging such as hormone related processes, and extrinsic factors such as damage from smoking or the UV rays from the sun (Manríquez et al., 2014). These things cause damage to the skin by thinning the outermost, protective layer of our skin called the Epidermis. This causes a loss of skin elasticity, skin fragility, and formation of lines/creases in the skin (Manríquez et al., 2014). All of these new changes to the texture and integrity of our skin present new challenges that can be by addressed by changing our skin care routines if they have begun to pose a problem to you.

At Home Treatment Approaches:

- Getting a facial or making one at home that aims to improve skin elasticity and provides it with nutrients to maintain healthy skin integrity (see recipe on page 5 below)
- Avoid direct sunlight to the skin by staying in shade or wearing longer, more protective clothing like UV resistant material
- Be sure to follow these precautions even when in the sun for a short period of time, such as walking around in daily life
- Quit smoking to avoid increased damage to skin quality and texture
- Wear sunblock on the face and skin every time you leave your house
- Apply an antioxidant rich moisturizer to defend the skin from the environmental factors that change skin integrity (Graf, 2010)
- Wear a hat to protect delicate facial skin from UV rays
- Be extra cautious of bumping into things because increased skin fragility makes it easier to get a cut and harder to heal



How Do These Changes Occur?

As we age, we also begin to see some changes occurring to our fingernails and toenails. Our nails tend to become brittle, dull, dense, and thick due to a diminished blood supply to our nail beds (Barney & Perkinson, 2016). We are definitely seeing a trend emerging here about the way environmental factors can damage our hair/skin, and our nails are no different. Many of these issues appear as we get older, and they are caused by exposure to these environmental conditions across the lifespan that dry out our nails, hinder their ability to grow, and cause them to become brittle/break easier (Dimitris & Ralph, 2012). Brittle nails are a common condition that affects 20% of the population, and makes nails soft, dry, weak, break easily, and hinder their ability to grow long (Dimitris & Ralph, 2012).

At Home Treatment Approaches:

- Decrease unnecessary wetting of hands and long-term exposure to water or chemicals, which absorb into the nail plate and contribute to brittleness. For example, wearing gloves while washing dishes.
- If you get your fingernails done at a salon, ensure the nail tech is knowledgeable about proper use of tools to avoid nail damage
- Be mindful to avoid repetitive trauma to the fingernails or toenails as a result of activities such as typing or walking in tight shoes
- If you cut your nails at home, be sure you are educated on proper trimming techniques to avoid damage to the nails. Refer to a physician/podiatrist (pg.7) or video on cutting techniques (pg. 6)
- Brittle nails can be caused by many things including various metabolic/nutritional disorders. Consult with a doctor to identify if this is a contributing factor and develop a treatment plan accordingly
- Avoid excessive nail polish remover use and use acetate over acetone
- Wear nail polish to act as a barrier for chemical contact with nail and keep water vapor in (enhancing moisture and flexibility).

Hair, Skin, and Nail Resources

Below are cost-conscious links to the devices mentioned above (just click the underlined [red](#) link's to access):

Hair

- [Wide tooth comb](#) (\$4.00)
- [Baby shampoo](#) (\$5.38)
- [Sun hat with UV protection](#) (\$9.95)
- [UV hair protectant spray](#) (\$14.99)

Skin:

- [Sunblock](#) (\$6.72)
- [UV resistant shirt](#) (\$14.99)
- [Antioxidant rich moisturizer](#) (\$10.34)
- Homemade antiaging facial recipe: (Choudhary et al., 2010).
 - o Egg whites for skin tightening
 - o Egg yolk, cucumber, green tea, and mint leaves for antioxidants (to prevent free radical damage to skin)

Nails:

- [Protective gloves](#) (\$8.99)
- [Non-acetone nail polish remover](#) (\$8.36)
- [Protective nail-polish](#) (\$6.79)
- [Ergonomic nail clippers- avoid slips/cuts](#) (\$9.99)
- Proper [toenail](#) and [fingernail](#) cutting techniques



Other Professionals/Services

- **Dermatologist:** meet with a dermatologist to discuss methods for promoting health of hair, skin, and nails such as prescription of ointments
- **Hair stylist/Esthetician:** meet with a hair stylist or esthetician to discuss product options to make hair and skin healthier, and provide it with various nutrients/ingredients that may be lacking
- **Counselors/psychologists:** to address psychological effects such as decreased stress/anxiety or depression that may be exacerbating some of these physical changes to hair, skin, and nails
- **Primary care physician:** consult with your doctor to make sure you are receiving sufficient vitamins and nutrition to promote healthy hair and nail growth/strength, and skin elasticity
- **Podiatrist:** locate a podiatrist to assist you with cutting toenails that become thick and hard to cut, as well as any other related issues that may arise with the nails or skin of your feet

How the Strategies Above Can Help You

These age-related changes to our hair, skin, and nails are all exacerbated by exposure to various environmental and personal factors. As we discussed, one of the most harmful environmental factors are the UV rays that come from the sun. Although it is important to protect our hair, skin, and nails from the damage that results from UV exposure, it is also important to do so in a way that does not impact your ability to enjoy life! Instead of opting out of a trip to the beach with the family to stay back in the shade or declining a game of catch for fear of breaking a brittle nail, instead implement the strategies above so that you do not let these body structures or environmental factors limit the activities you engage in, or the extent to which you choose to participate. By incorporating the strategies and products mentioned above, we can make an attempt to restore participation in daily activities and functioning in order to increase occupational engagement. Furthermore, research suggests that for some, these age-related changes with one's appearance can sometimes act as a limiting factor to participation that reduces self-esteem and in turn quality of life (Ahluwali & Fabi, 2019). If you feel that is the case and are looking to make some changes to your self-care routine, use some of these tips above to enhance your self-confidence in order to increase community participation and interpersonal relationships! So, grab your hat and sunscreen and get out there to have fun with your family/friends!

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