

Educational Goals

At the end of the lesson, participants will be able to:

- Identify clothing that provides ease of dressing.
- Identify fashionable but comfortable clothing for seniors
- Identify fashion mistakes of senior citizens.



Fashion Over 40...

Senior Friendly Clothing

FCE Lesson by Jan Williams

Bledsoe County Extension 2007

There has never been a more fashionable time to be an older or “senior” citizen than the present. With the aging population of America, more and more clothing companies are catering to the needs of seniors by offering clothing options that are fashionable, comfortable, and functional.

One fashion expert said, “Society doesn’t recognize the importance of clothing for the more mature citizen. A lot of money is spent to produce fashions for children, but few designers think that the elderly deserve that.” But today’s designers and manufacturers are realizing the growing market for senior citizens. They are not the seniors of yesterday! They have more money, leisure time and are more active.

Although older women are not likely to be convinced that they should trade in their wardrobe every year for the latest fashions, they clearly are interested in buying new clothes, according to Bureau of Labor Statistics information identified by Home Instead Senior Care. Consumer expenditure research reveals that people age 55 or older spend \$256 a year per person on women’s clothes compared with \$243 per person for all ages.

“Having a new dress matters a lot to a woman of any age,” Wells says, a fashion editor. “And most older men don’t want to sit around in their pajamas all day.”

The experts at Silvert’s, a long standing senior clothing company, suggest older senior citizens and caregivers make clothing selections easier by following a few simple guidelines. They offer the following tips on dressing for senior citizens:



Dressing for Ease & Comfort

It is important to remember that your wardrobe should keep pace with your changing lifestyle and needs. Let's face it, we all have to cope with issues of dressing at least twice daily, 365 days a year. Here a few helpful hints to make your life and dressing more enjoyable!!!

Fabric content

Throw away that iron! Who has the time, energy or money to spend on ironing and dry cleaning? Choose fabrics with a high level of washability. These are fabrics that resist shrinkage in everyday washing such as polyester or a combination of polyester. When choosing a cotton garment, make sure that it is 50% polyester/50% cotton or 65% polyester/35% cotton. The garment will then not require ironing and will have a low shrinkage factor. Fabrics should contain less than 30% rayon, silk, linen or wool content.

Arthritic Dressing

Do you have arthritis? Why struggle with your clothing when there are pain free solutions?

- Velcro/Easy Touch closures on pants, skirts and blouses make dressing a dream.
- Long front zip or button fastenings help with low hand dexterity.
- Choose clothing with larger openings which enable you to put the garment over your head while seated or step into the opening without a struggle.

Fabric Elasticity

Choosing a fabric which easily expands and stretches for ease of dressing, yet retains its shape is the best. The elasticity of a fabric is determined by both the weave and blend of the material. It is important to choose fabrics that are woven into a knit or interlock. However, today we now have many garments made from fabric that has 1-5% spandex in the fabric providing greater comfort. This is especially helpful when you deal with occasional swelling of the abdomen or limbs.

100% polyester and 100% acrylic not only lend elasticity to a fabric but reduce the amount of permanent shrinkage after initial washing. Many cool cotton blends meet this requirement today.

Key words to look for when purchasing garments with high levels of elasticity:

- Polyester
- Cotton Polyester
- Polyester interlock
- Acrylic
- Polyester Gabardine
- "Stretchable fabric" blends

Senior Style with Expert Kim Johnson Gross

Ease and comfort are not the only thing seniors need to look at when they consider fashion. Are your pleated pants giving away your true age? ... What about your "stuck in a beauty moment" makeup or hair that hasn't been updated in years?

If you are a woman over 40, you need to know that you can be just as sexy and vital looking as your younger counterparts, according to style expert Kim Johnson Gross, creator of the Chic Simple line of books and Style Guide for About.com. It just takes looking at your wardrobe and beauty habits with a critical eye and finding what works for you.

Big Changes

One of the most challenging fashion aspects for women over 40 is how to dress for the changes that are occurring.

"Our bodies are in transition. Our lifestyles are changing. We may be becoming empty nesters, divorcing, starting new jobs, or just enjoying our lives," said Gross.

"As your body is changing, so must your clothes," she said. Let's look at some of the suggestions given by Gross and other fashion experts to bring us up to date with ease and comfort.

- **I**tems with detachable belts allow individuals to place belts where they find them most comfortable or to detach them if necessary.
- **L**oose, full fitting garments allow for easy movement.
- **S**hoes and bags are the quickest way to update your look. Women over 40 need to learn how to adapt trends that will work for them.

Each day, caregivers see older and elderly seniors struggling to get dressed in clothing that is not senior friendly. Thanks to the people at companies like Silvert's, senior citizens are able to dress fashionably while maintaining the functionality required for aging adults. You have to learn how to flatter your body without doing a style overhaul.

And even if you are in the best shape of your life, such as 50-something Oprah, your body is physiologically changing, from thinning hair to ruddier, duller skin.

The key to dealing with the changes and being your best is to refresh your look, said Gross, who is currently working on a book about style over 40.

Most of all you need to learn to **NOT** hang onto what worked before; undergo what Gross calls a "style evolution" and learn to dress for your new assets.

The handouts can help guide you through that process. Of course, none of us can use all the suggestions but we can pick one or several that fit our needs, likes and budgets and work from there.



Suggested Club Activities:

1. Have a senior style show modeling favorite *classic* accessory or garment.
2. Ask several members to wear to club meeting and model one of the “*top 5 things grown women should never wear*” to the club meeting.
3. Have club members share their best new fashion buy of the season.

Steps to Get Started Looking Your Best

1. Look at mature television and movie actresses you admire and emulate their look.



2. Shop at stores that cater to stylish, mature women. Some examples are Christopher Banks, Liz Claiborne, Sag Harbor, Ann Taylor, Charter Club and Jones New York as a few of the manufacturers and designers who offer great selections for women over 40.

3. Don't be afraid to experiment! By the time you are 50 you have some sense of what your style is. You probably have the basics down and now it's time to add pizzazz like adding bold glasses or wearing a collar turned up.



4. Recycle pieces from your closet (with caution). Gross said that some trends can come back and you can revisit them with a twist. She says chain belts are a good example. But she said the classics -- trench coats, Pucci prints, leopard prints -- are the best pieces to keep pulling out.





Fashion Sins for Over 40

Handout 2

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Most of all you need learn to **not** hang onto what worked before; undergo what Gross calls a "style evolution" and learn to dress for your new assets.

Gross gives a few guidelines that will help you look your best:

- Don't dress too young. "The worst thing you can do is to dress younger than you are," said Gross. "It makes you look older."
- No miniskirts, regardless of how great your legs are, said this former model (who is thinking about making pillows out of her minis).
- Skip baggy clothes and look for pieces that give you shape.
- Don't think you can wear the same colors you did in your 20s (at least not against your face).
- Don't pick colors from color charts; experiment by trying on different colors when you go shopping. "You'll know your colors instantly it when you see them," she said.
- "Trendy is no longer attractive," she said. "Don't worry about the trend of the moment." Instead, she suggested you find a print or a bold piece of jewelry and develop a signature look.

Fashion and Beauty Fixes

Gravity takes its toll on women of a certain age, but fashion tricks can camouflage most of these problems:

- **Wrinkled neck** - Stand-up or turn-up collars are a great way to cover that area and bring focus to the face. Candace Bergen in "Boston Legal" is a good example of making that look work.
- **Thick in the middle** - Add jackets and pieces that will give you shape.
- **Thinner hair**- "Your hair has to suit you. Get a fresh cut," according to fashion expert Gross. She also said shorter hair gives more of a lift and the variety of new products can improve your hairstyle.
- **Focus on shoulders and legs** - They are the slowest to age. That doesn't mean wearing miniskirts, but you can bring attention to legs with a knee-length skirt and sexy shoes.
- **Change in coloring** - Gross reminds women to lighten up. One tip she got from a chic former fashion director was to always wear a bit of white close to the face. Soft colors -- pale pink, white, beige, ice blue -- bring light to the face, she said.

Media Release:

Fashion Over 40....Senior Friendly Clothing

_____ County FCE members will learn why this is a great time to be a “senior” citizen in many ways including fashion at their club meetings this month. Today more than ever before the clothing industry is realizing that the over 40 population is quickly increasing in numbers, seniors are remaining very active and they have more disposable money and leisure time than other segments of the population. Today’s seniors are fashion conscious but don’t necessarily follow “fashion trends.” They purchase fashions they like, that meet their needs and are comfortable. They are not the seniors of yesterday and clothing companies and designers are paying attention.

They prefer fabrics that are washable and require little care. There is now a wide range of fabric combinations including polyester, cotton, acetate, rayon, silk, linen, wool and spandex that provide comfort, fashion and ease of care. Seniors wanting washability, low shrinkage and little ironing should look for fabrics that contain 50-70% polyester blended with 30-50% other materials. Garments containing 1-5% spandex will give more comfort and ease of movement. 100% polyester or acetate are both great choices for elasticity and low shrinkage – after the initial washing. Key words to look for are polyester, cotton polyester, polyester interlock, acetate, polyester gabardine and “stretchable fabric” blends.

Seniors also must consider the changes, physical and life-style, they are undergoing when choosing styles. One of the key ways to deal with these changes and be your best is to refresh your look. Most seniors aren’t willing to do a complete wardrobe replacement but do need to clean out some of the items they have held on to for *too* many years. To dress for the many changes as you age, you must learn to discard what no longer works for the changing “you” -- let it go...to the Goodwill bin!

As your skin and hair change, so do the colors that work best for you. You don’t need to look to color charts for answers, you’ll know a flattering color as soon as you put the garment on!

A few final tips....one of the quickest, easiest ways to update your fashion is to update your shoes and handbags. Also, don’t get trendy and don’t dress too young—it will only make you look older. Skip those baggy clothes for something that will give you some shape. Last but definitely not least, don’t forget that when it comes to hair nothing will give you a fashion lift like a good hair cut and a smile that lights up your eyes.



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