

Your Life, Not Your Genes, is What Adds Years to Your Face

Your mother's wrinkles may not be the best predictor of how you'll age. A study involving identical twins suggests that despite genetic make-up, certain environmental factors can add years to a person's perceived age. Factors such as divorce or the use of antidepressants are the real culprits that cause facial aging.

Researchers obtained comprehensive questionnaires and digital images from nearly 200 pairs of identical twins. The images were reviewed by an independent panel, which recorded the perceived age difference between the siblings.

Study subjects who had been divorced appeared nearly two years older than their siblings who were married, single or even widowed. Antidepressant use was associated with a significantly older appearance, and researchers also found that major weight gain or loss played a major factor, too.

In sets of twins who were less than 40 years old, the heavier twin was perceived as being older, while in those groups over 40 years old, the heavier twin appeared younger.

The presence of stress could be one of the common denominators that caused facial aging. The researchers also suspected that continued relaxation of the facial muscles due to antidepressant use could account for sagging.

Sources:

- » *EurekaAlert February 3, 2009*
- » *Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery Journal*

Dr. Mercola's Comments:

Interestingly, this article is published in the official medical journal of the American Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS), and the study's author, Bahaman Guyuron, MD, is also one of their member surgeons, so the study may have some ulterior motives.

As Dr. Guyuron said, "Our findings put science behind the idea that volume replacement rejuvenates the face."

In other words, plastic surgeons can use the finding that fuller faces appeared younger after age 40 as "proof" that injectable filler plastic surgery procedures can make you look younger. Already, more than 1.5 million such procedures were performed in 2007, according to ASPS statistics.

But to me, the REALLY interesting part of this study has nothing to do with going out and having your face injected with fat in an attempt to look a few years younger. Instead, what struck me was the finding that your life experiences shape the look of your face as you age, far more than your genes do.

People who had been through the stress of a divorce looked nearly two years older than their married,

single or even widowed twin. Those who used antidepressants also appeared significantly older. The researchers attributed this to the drugs causing continued relaxation of the facial muscles, which led to sagging, but it could also be that those taking antidepressants were under some type of psychological stress.

For those of you who are regular readers, you'll know that this lends further credence to the emerging and [incredibly interesting field of epigenetics](#), which centers around the notion that environmental factors such as stress and your diet influence the expression of your genes.

And it is the expression of your genes -- NOT the genes themselves -- that dictates whether you develop certain diseases or age prematurely.

How Stress Shapes Your Genes

Parents often joke about how their grey hairs all magically appeared after their kids were born. Likewise, if you've ever watched someone go through a divorce or other emotionally trying time, they can seem to age 10 years in a matter of months.

Even if you've faced just a few stressful days in a row, you'll often be able to see it written all over your face.

These are prime examples of the toll stress can take on you physically.

As proven through the massive genetic study, the Genome Project, each one of your genes can create up to 30,000 proteins, any and all of which can create a different outcome. So the fact that you may have a genetic "predisposition" for facial wrinkles, for example, does not mean that you are doomed to develop a face full of wrinkles during middle-age.

There is something that either activates or suppresses your genes, and research by Bruce Lipton, PhD., a forerunner in the field of epigenetics and *The New Biology*, has shown it is often related to your mind.

In other words, whether you are mentally stressed or able to [maintain a more positive outlook](#) can influence the expression of your genes, and thus directly impact how you age.

Consider a study done back in 2001, which assessed how quickly the skin of medical students could recover from having a piece of sticky tape applied to it. What they found was skin recovery seemed to be directly linked to stress levels -- with high stress during exams associated with a decreased ability of the aggravated skin to return to normal function.

They concluded that [stress lessens your skin's ability to function properly](#), heal wounds and fight disease, and could put you at an increased risk of skin diseases like psoriasis or dermatitis.

Meanwhile, scientific data has revealed that extended exposure to psychological stress could [speed up the aging process of your cells](#) and cause them to die at a faster rate than normal.

Taken as a whole, what this means is your body's ability to resist and adapt appropriately to both

internal and external stresses is essential for good health, and the hallmark of aging is your body's inability to withstand stress, which then starts to degrade it.

The solution, therefore, to preventing premature aging and having a youthful appearance on the outside is to effectively deal with your stress, and teach your body how to best tolerate it. This is great news, as it means that you have the ability to directly influence the way you age, simply based on your mental outlook.

Top Tips for Effectively Dealing With Stress

The key is not getting rid of stress completely, as we all face stressful situations from time to time (even exercise is a form of stress), but rather adjusting your body's ability to tolerate the stress. Here are my top tips for doing so:

- **Release negative emotions with the Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT).** EFT, considered by many to be the ultimate stress-management tool, targets a person's disrupted energy meridian system as the real driver behind heightened stress levels. This simple do-it-yourself acupuncture technique balances your energy and eliminates your body and mind's stress response.
- **Exercise.** Physical activity is an excellent way to relieve tension and ward off the physical consequences of stress. Studies have shown that during exercise, tranquilizing chemicals, endorphins, are released in your brain, making exercise a natural way to bring your body pleasurable relaxation and rejuvenation.
- **Get plenty of sleep.** Regularly catching only a few hours of sleep can hinder metabolism and hormone production in a way that is similar to the effects of aging and the early stages of diabetes. Plus, your body needs high-quality sleep to help it deal with stressful situations.
- **Optimize your diet.** Eating the [right foods for your nutritional type](#) can have a direct impact on your mood. It's also important to get plenty of omega-3 fat, from fish oil or krill oil, as it can help to [reduce psychological distress and depressive symptoms](#).

Omega-3 fats also help to normalize skin lipids and prevent dehydration in your cells. This keeps skin cells strong and full of moisture, which can help to decrease the appearance of fine lines.

What Else Can You do to Look Younger?

Focusing on the bright side of life is only one key way to [keep a fresh, youthful appearance](#).

One of the most important strategies you can possibly do is to optimize your vitamin D levels by appropriate sun or safe tanning bed exposure. If this is not an option then taking an oral vitamin D supplement is the next best option. But if you take this route you must [be sure and have your blood levels tested](#) as there are simply too many factors to predict what the correct dose is unless you measure it.

Vitamin D controls about 2,000-3,000 of your genes and can radically improve every system in your body -- including your appearance. If you use the preferred UVB exposure to optimize your vitamin D

levels you need to know that it is important not to overdo it. You only need enough exposure to turn your skin the slightest pink.

Additional exposure will not increase your vitamin D level but it will increase premature aging of your skin. So be careful and prudent out there.

As I said earlier, it is also helpful to pay attention to what you're eating, and this one is so important it bears repeating. By consuming large amounts of whole, unprocessed, healthy raw foods that are loaded with antioxidants, you can help to slow down the speed at which signs of your real age show up.

In fact, one of the reasons I started [vegetable juicing](#) is that I would see 75-year-old women in my practice who looked like they were 40 years old with virtually no facial wrinkles. Most of them were doing large amounts of juicing and led healthy lifestyles.

Juicing is actually a great way to get more raw veggies into your diet, as long as you fine-tune your vegetable selections based on your nutritional type, and if at all possible, aim to buy [organic, locally-grown vegetables](#) that are in season.

It's also important to cut back on sugar. Diets high in sugar increase free radicals and oxidative stress, and leads to signs of premature aging.

And the sooner you start to make these positive changes -- to your stress levels, mental outlook and your diet -- the better. Whether you're young or old, this healthy lifestyle will help keep the signs of aging away, or at least slow them down considerably.

Reference website: <http://articles.mercola.com/sites/articles/archive/2009/02/19/Your-Life-Not-Your-Genes-is-What-Adds-Years-to-Your-Face.aspx>