

Secrets to keeping your youth

What researchers are 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 is not a simply a matter of having genes like those of a tortoise. We realize that heredity accounts for about 30% of the difference in how well most people age. The rest is up to you and your smart choices. Some people can look 20 years younger than they really are. It is because they do the right things to prevent sun damage, which causes about 85% of what used to be considered age-related skin changes. Wrinkles only get more noticeable as your skin gets thinner, dryer and less elastic over time. Sun exposure dramatically accelerates this decline. 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. Here's how: use a sunscreen with UVA and UVB protection. A smart choice: Blue Lizard sunscreen or Cotz sunblock. They provide broad spectrum UVA/UVB protection in a light, non-greasy formula. They have a unique system with triple protection action to deflect, scatter and absorb UV rays before they reach the skin. The best way to wear it: Apply at least SPF 35 in the morning in the summer and SPF 15 in the winter under make-up, as you would a moisturizer, before you go outdoors. If you shower, exercise, swim or perspire, you will need to reapply. 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 the mirror as you turn toward a bright light (a department store lamp will do). If you blink or squint, go bigger, darker, Jackie-O style lens. Note: Glasses labeled "100% UV protection" usually provide it even if they are the \$5.00 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. Keep your hat on. Wear a wide-brimmed hat if you are outside between dawn and dusk. You may be aware that short-wave ultraviolet light (UVB), which causes wrinkling and potentially cancerous skin changes, peaks between 10am and 2 pm, but long wave ultraviolet light (UVA), which adds to UVB damage, is unwaveringly intense until sundown. Only you need to know that your chic hat is helping protect your face from wrinkles, roughness, blotches and other hallmark of aging. Everyone else will think it's a fashion statement.