

Anti-aging strategies can improve more than looks

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For many men and women older than 30, the fun of birthdays fades with aging, but experts at the University of Alabama at Birmingham offer advice on how to slow aging and boost self-esteem.

"Photoaging—or the changes induced by chronic UVA and UVB exposure—is responsible for accelerating the [skin](#)'s aging process," said Marian Northington, M.D., director of UAB Cosmetic Dermatology.

"Daily incidental sun exposures—running out to the car, going to the

mailbox and exercising —add up and result in [wrinkles](#), sun spots and potentially cancerous lesions," Northington said. "The No. 1 way people can prevent photoaging is wearing a 30-plus SPF sunscreen—one that contains zinc oxide—every day."

If it is too late, and the sun has already done its damage, or if someone is just more mature in age, there are ways to diminish the signs of aging.

"Using an over-the-counter cream with retinol, which is a vitamin A derivative, can decrease the risk of [skin cancer](#) and improve [skin pigmentation](#) and abnormalities, as well as increase collagen content to help with lines and wrinkles," Northington said.

Northington adds that, if more advanced methods are needed, a visit to the cosmetic dermatologist can offer safe and effective noninvasive options that will reduce photoaging with little downtime.

"Fraxel laser resurfacing is an excellent way to improve wrinkles, pigmentation and abnormalities," Northington said. "There are also skin-tightening devices that improve skin laxity, as well as injections that will replace lost volume that occurs with aging to lift the face nonsurgically and reduce lines and wrinkles."

Northington says studies have shown some dermatologic skin-improvement methods have benefits beyond an improved appearance.

"People who have had fillers reported that they felt they make a better first impression with other people, but they also feel better with themselves and happier with their lives," Northington said.

Josh Klapow, Ph.D., associate professor in the UAB School of Public Health and a psychologist, echoes this notion.

"Outward appearance can have a significant impact on a person's self-esteem, so 'looking better' both in one's own eyes and in the eyes of others can add to self-esteem," Klapow said. "However, self-esteem is an internal experience that needs to be driven by far more than appearance."

Klapow said unrealistic expectations about looks can spell trouble, as it is hard for people in their 70s to look as though they are in their 20s. If the idea of looking younger is kept in perspective, however, it can lead to a healthier mental state.

"Feeling good about what you look like can help you feel better about who you are," Klapow said. "But feeling good about who you are, independent of what you look like, is a far more powerful way to have and keep high self-esteem."

Provided by University of Alabama at Birmingham

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