



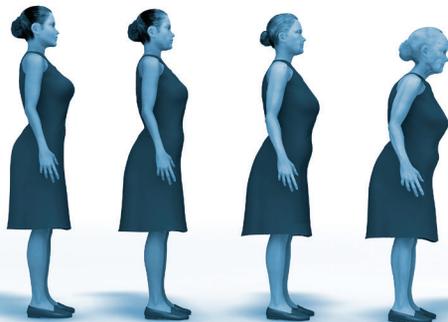
7 SURPRISING SIGNS OF AGING

Many of us have something in mind when we think about the signs of aging. Laugh lines or crow's feet. Stiff knees. Graying hair. For late funny woman Nora Ephron, it was her neck. The writer of *When Harry Met Sally...*, *Sleepless in Seattle* and *You've Got Mail* famously wrote a book called *I Feel Bad About My Neck*, detailing how, in spite of the many ways to disguise aging, "the neck is a dead giveaway." She's right about the neck area aging faster than other parts of the body—the skin is typically thinner there, it's exposed to the sun, gets crinkled during sleep and isn't often exfoliated. But there are other surprising telltale indicators of aging. Here are seven signs to watch out for, why they happen—and what they could mean for your health. *By Leslie Goldman*

1 SHRINKING

You may think it's a myth that people shrink with age, but it's true. In fact, women shrink an average of 1.97 inches and men 1.18 inches from age 30 to 70 years, according to the Baltimore Longitudinal Study of Aging. Most of this shrinkage is normal age-related compression of the padding that separates the vertebrae in your spine. This is different from osteoporosis, which is the result of bone loss.

The fix: While you can't reverse normal shrinkage, you can remind yourself to stand up straight and pull in your tummy to help strengthen your core and maintain good posture. If you're worried about osteoporosis, talk to your doctor about prevention and treatment.



2 DROOPING EARLOBES

"Over the years, sun exposure combined with loss of collagen and elasticity in the skin of the earlobes can cause them to become wrinkled, thin and droopy," says New York City-based dermatologist Kally Papantoniou, M.D. Years of wearing pierced earrings may also make your lobes more prone to sagging.

The fix: A dermatologist can perk up your lobes with injections of hyaluronic acid fillers such as Restylane or Juvéderm. Results are immediate, look natural and should last about a year. (Fillers are considered cosmetic, so insurance will not cover them.)

3 SORE FEET

It's no wonder that after walking (the suggested) 3-million-plus steps a year—for many years—your feet may hurt now and then. But there is an ailment that age plus weight can really aggravate: It's plantar fasciitis (pronounced *flash-ee-EYE-tiss*), a condition affecting about 2 million Americans a year. The most common symptom is pain on the bottom of the foot near the heel in the morning or pain that gets worse after (not during) exercise or activity.

The plantar fascia is a long, thin ligament that supports your arch. "With age comes more wear and tear to the entire musculoskeletal system," says Carol Frey, M.D., spokesperson for the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons. Weight gain, common with age, boosts your odds even further.

The fix: More than 90 percent of plantar fasciitis cases improve within 10 months of starting treatment, which includes rest, icing (roll your foot over a frozen water bottle for 20 minutes, three times a day), orthotic inserts and stretching. Try this stretch: Place your hands on a wall, stand with your unaffected leg forward, slight bend at the knee. Your affected leg should be straight and behind you, heel flat. Keeping heels flat, press your hips forward as you lean toward the wall without arching your back. Hold for 30 seconds.



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4 DRY MOUTH

While having a dry mouth isn't a direct result of aging, it's a common symptom of some medications for age-related conditions, says Natalie Hastings, D.M.D., a division chair of clinical general dentistry at the University of California, San Francisco School of Dentistry. More than 400 medications cause dry mouth, including blood pressure drugs and anti-depressants.



Individuals with obstructive sleep apnea—a breathing condition that tends to afflict older, overweight individuals—often wake with dry mouth after wearing a sleep appliance that props their mouth open all night.

The fix: If you suffer from dry mouth, you're more prone to cavities, thanks to low levels of saliva (which actually helps neutralize acids from foods). Hastings recommends frequently sipping water, rinsing your mouth with a solution of baking soda and water (2 tsp in 8 oz water) four times a day to help neutralize any acids and brushing with a prescription-strength fluoride toothpaste, like Clinpro 5000 (available at dental offices). You also can chew sugar-free gum between meals to stimulate saliva production.

5 HAIRLESS LEGS AND FEET

Just as we lose hair on our heads, hair growth on legs may diminish over time. But one cause may be something to worry about. Hair follicles are nourished by blood flow. If your arteries, which deliver oxygen-rich blood to the extremities, clog with plaque (due to age, diet, lifestyle or genetics), the hair on your legs and feet could fall out.

The problem goes beyond poor circulation. Justin Trivax, M.D., co-medical director of Beaumont Health's Cardiovascular Performance Clinic in Royal Oak, Mich., warns that 60 to 80 percent of patients with leg artery blockage symptoms have severe blockages in their heart arteries too, which could lead to a heart attack. Diabetes, hormone deficiencies, thyroid or autoimmune disease or dermatitis (skin inflammation) also can cause hair loss.

The fix: Have your circulation evaluated by a doctor, particularly if you have burning, cramping pain with walking or thickened toenails. A simple, in-office ultrasound can diagnose arterial disease. Exercise, medication and quitting smoking can help slow plaque buildup, Trivax says, and help reverse heart disease.

6 SPOTTED HANDS

Despite their name, those liver spots on the backs of your hands have nothing to do with the health of that organ. These flat, dark markings are a sign of sun exposure, says Craig Vander Kolk, M.D., director of cosmetic medicine and surgery at Mercy Medical Center in Baltimore. "The sun stimulates the pigment in your skin, causing it to move through the skin's layers and ultimately settle into localized spots." Common after age 40, age spots aren't a danger to anything but your vanity.

The fix: Skin-bleaching creams containing an ingredient called hydroquinone can soften the appearance of spots, but use caution if you have sensitive skin. (One to try: Ambi Skincare Fade Cream, \$5 at major retailers.) Lasers and chemical peels can help too. And slather on sunblock to prevent new age spots from forming and existing ones from darkening.

7 DISAPPEARING EYEBROWS

Pluck-happy in your earlier years? You may be paying the price now. "When hair is traumatically pulled out of the follicle repeatedly, it might not grow back," Papantoniou says. The result: eyebrows that are sparse even decades later.

Even if you never touched tweezers, the same age-related hormones responsible for hair loss on the head can deplete facial hair. If your brows are suddenly visibly thinner than normal, see an endocrinologist—you may have a vitamin deficiency or thyroid condition.

The fix: To preserve and protect fragile brows, Neia Frinhani, wax and brow specialist at the Adam Broderick Salon & Spa in Ridgefield, Conn., recommends sleeping on your back or on a silk pillowcase to reduce friction. Trim—don't pluck—unruly brow hairs. Other options include using one of the many brow-filling products available, looking into the growing market in permanent makeup brows (similar to tattooing) or consulting a dermatologist about hair-growth methods.



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