

Navigating Midlife



A SERIES DESIGNED TO MEET THE CONCERNS AND NEEDS OF OUR AGING POPULATION

Clothing for the Changing Figure

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Have you experienced some clothing concerns because of changes in your figure in recent years? As we age, certain body changes occur. A good diet, exercise, mental and physical activity, and genetics play a part, but to some extent, everyone experiences physical changes. These changes in body contour, weight distribution and posture influence clothing selections. Mature adults, just as the young, want clothing that looks good, fits well, and is comfortable. Some designs will help accommodate body needs while others can help camouflage less desired changes.

Line

One way to disguise less appealing physical attributes is through the design element of line. The lines of a garment make a big difference in how it looks on you, and how you feel when you wear it.

Whether you are tall or short, slender or not-so-slender, lines will change the appearance of your figure. The vertical line or a narrow panel leads the eye up and down the figure, thus giving the appearance of height. This illusion can be created through styling, color combinations, or even the use of a jacket or vest.

The horizontal line or a wide panel leads the eye across the figure and seems to add width. Single breasted clothing is more flattering and creates a vertical line where double breasted treatment gives a wider appearance. Even the style and tilt of a hat can make a person look taller or shorter.

Jacket length creates a horizontal line. Therefore determining optimum jacket length becomes a key decision in trying to disguise fuller hips. Avoid jackets that end at the middle of the seat. Choose a length longer or shorter. Coat-style jackets can help to create a vertical line.

Color

Color influences how we look in what we wear. Colors that are flattering to skin tone and pleasing in relation to hair and eye color, can emphasize positive features while distracting from less flattering ones. Midlife changes in hair color and skin tone may alter the colors that are most complimentary. The colors that were most dramatic in youthful years may need to be re-evaluated in the middle years.

Of course, black or navy produces a slender illusion for larger figure types, but do not limit clothing choices to only dark colors. Cool hues of blue, green, or violet create a more slimming appearance than the warm hues of orange, red, and yellow. Steer away from shiny fabrics, such as satin or beads; these add pounds.

Color blocking is characterized by the use of color in blocks or bands to create visual interest. Selection of color blocked garments that have lighter or brighter colors near the face draw the eye upward and away from other areas of the body.

Construction Elements

Garments that feature a front and back yoke can camouflage a rounded upper back. They are also helpful when alterations for a prominent back shoulder area or a hollow chest may be needed. Gathers in the front or back shoulder area also add softness to conceal body changes in those spots.

Vertical tucks, shoulder pleats, and contour seaming can also disguise a dropped bustline.

Sleeve designs not anchored by a traditional set-in seam such as dolman, kimono, and raglan, are useful for more comfort if upper arms have become fuller. Sleeves that are cut-in-one with the bodice and dropped shoulder designs are also a good choice.

A thickened waistline can be accommodated best without waistline definition. Garments that skim the body and bypass the waistline will be most flattering. Often accessories that bring focus to the face can be used with these styles. Select styles that include neckline and shoulder interest. If separates are preferred, it is best if the top and bottom match or blend to avoid color contrast which draws attention to the waist or hip area.

Adaptations for neck fullness and a forward head position can be made using necklines which do not fit snugly around the neck. A sailor collar or shawl collar style would be useful for this purpose. Soft draping, whether part of the styling or through the use of a scarf, can camouflage a crepey neck and be comfortable to wear.

Soft and drapery fabrics flatter most heavy figures, but only if not too fitted. Stiff fabrics can camouflage less attractive features, but add bulk when used in exaggerated silhouettes.

Become familiar with specific figure needs. Consider the relationship of several body changes and what multi-design details in garments can accommodate them. Fabric, style detailing, ease, shape, and accessories contribute to a total look. Clothing, if well chosen, can enhance the beauty of aging and midlife will not be characterized by that era "when your chest falls into your drawers."

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