

Premature Aging Signs You Shouldn't Overlook

Sonja Morgan, cast member of Bravo reality [series](#) *The Real Housewives of New York City*, has always considered herself relatively healthy. She takes care of herself, does [yoga](#) and eats well. But at age 47, she saw the signs of age creeping up: Dry skin, cravings for salty snacks, irritability and that impossible-to-lose bulge around the midsection. Should she just chalk it up to getting older, Morgan wondered, or pay closer attention to her body's built-in [warning signs](#)?

It's no secret that the body gets older every day. Or that Time will leave its imprint no matter how many downward-facing dog poses we hold. But for most of us, the real mystery is in deciphering the difference between normal aging symptoms and signs of deeper health issues. [ForbesWoman](#) asked dietitians, neurologists, dermatologists and anti-aging specialists to set the record straight about the premature aging signs you shouldn't overlook.

"The human body is like a private corporation that you own," says Eric Braverman, a clinical assistant professor at Weill Cornell Medical Center in New York and the author of *Younger (Sexier) You*. He believes that aging symptoms are like red ink on a balance sheet—if one system is failing, the whole thing may soon collapse. "A lot of people are [Lehman Brothers](#)," he says.

So are those deepening crow's feet a cosmetic annoyance or something more? Dermatologist Audrey Kunin says one of the first signs of prematurely aging skin is the noticeable loss of a [glowing complexion](#), paired with dark circles, fine lines or dry, less elastic skin. The cosmetic issue can quickly improve by drinking lots of water, eating Vitamin-rich foods and using topical creams with anti-aging ingredients like buffered glycolic acid and retinol, she says.

However, Kunin cautions against dismissing skin issues as "just" age. "Too much [sun damage](#) can result in the development of skin cancers as early as one's 20s and 30s," she warns. Kunin recommends consulting a doctor if skin is itchy or bleeding or if a mole changes in size or takes on jagged contours.

Furthermore Lorraine Maita, an internist and anti-aging specialist, suggests taking stock of the color of your skin. What you perceive as dull and faded may be more than skin deep. If it appears too yellow, it could signify a problem in the liver, she says. Likewise, a gray tint may indicate kidney issues, and blue lips might suggest a lack of oxygen from the lungs. Maita notes that wrinkling and sagging skin may not signify an illness but serve as red flags that your tissues are breaking down. [Foods](#) rich in antioxidants may help to halt or reverse the damage.

Braverman points out that not all premature aging signs are written on your face. Like Morgan (his patient), many start to see more fat around the belly or at the backs of the arms. At the same time, hands become dry, sleep cycles are interrupted, fatigue sets in and it becomes harder to get started in the mornings. "These are the first markers of brain shrinkage," he says. They could be triggered by a host of factors including smoking, eating fatty, processed foods and not getting enough fresh air. Braverman typically views these brain-agers as a chemical imbalance. After Morgan began taking supplements and hormone replacements, she says her skin became suppler, she felt younger and she stopped craving [coffee](#) (a diuretic), alcohol and desserts.

Brain health is crucial, but don't panic over forgotten keys, recommends Elizabeth Somer, a dietician and author of *Age-Proof Your Body*. "Most people think they remembered things better in their youth than they actually did," she says. However, some habits are proven to protect your brain well into the [future](#). About 60% of brain aging is within our control, she says, by maintaining vigorous exercise routines, a healthy diet, social engagement and stimulating activities or environments. Plus, a [study](#) published last year in the journal *Alzheimer's and Dementia* found that taking Omega-3 DHA supplements took three years off the brain, improving memory and learning skills.

Somer says that there are some aging indicators that are out of your control. Arthritis and declining vision may simply be a facet of getting older, she laments.

Others don't manifest themselves until it's too late. "There are no symptoms of [bone loss](#) until you get a fracture," Somer says. Because most of your bone density is built up before your 30s, she suggests storing up on calcium in your 20s and then continuing to eat a high-calcium diet. Similarly, [heart disease](#) can be deadly and often doesn't reveal itself until you have a heart attack. "Keep your arteries squeaky skin," she says. "Eat a diet low in saturated fats, high in omega-3s and with lots of fruits, vegetable, beans and oats."