

*Forty and Still
Fabulous!*

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Dedication: For my husband, Ben

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Introduction

In May 2004, Elle Macpherson arrived in Sydney to an unprecedented flurry of media excitement. Although being the centre of attention isn't exactly a new experience for Australia's most famous supermodel, on this occasion the reason behind the furore was a little different. Every journalist within spitting distance of 'The Body' had a single, pressing question: 'So what's it like to be 40?' Macpherson had hit the big 4-0 two months earlier and speaking to the media—looking exquisite in ways most women can only dream of—she gave them her spin on things: 'It's not scary at all', she said. 'I feel better than I ever felt. I don't think turning 40 these days has the same connotation that it did generations ago. The alternative is not turning 40 and what would that mean?'

Turning 40 is regarded by many people as a key milestone in a person's life. Some psychobabblers have dubbed it 'the launch pad for a mid-life crisis', while others see it as a time to do some soul searching about the meaning of life, the world and your role in it. But in today's world, what turning 40 truly means is trickier to define than it used to be—especially if you're a woman. In days gone by it meant slowing down, emptying your nest and lamenting the passing of your youth. But today, many fortysomething women are just as likely to be marrying for the first time, starting a family, launching their own business, or getting that top job in a major international corporation.

I hit the big 4-0 six months before Elle Macpherson and at the time I didn't really think much of it. After all, it's not like you turn 40 and everything changes the very next day—nothing falls off, expires, or stops working just like that! But

the fuss surrounding Macpherson's big birthday got me thinking about what it's really like to be a fortysomething woman today, so I decided to explore a number of important areas of life which I felt may have changed over the years: health, sex, babies, careers and fashion among them. Then I wrote a major article on the subject for a leading Australian health magazine and the feedback I got from people who read it was not only positive, but also insightful. What was clear is that many women disagree with the 'over the hill' moniker with which our age group has been traditionally labelled. Rather than slowing down, many of us are cranking up our lives for a second innings.

The truth is that from the day we are born we start to age. The only difference is that we don't associate ageing with a curious toddler, a temperamental teen, or a twentysomething launching herself into the world at large. For reasons dictated by society and the media, we have been conditioned to start thinking about the concept of ageing after our thirtieth birthday. And, by the time we hit the big 4-0, many of us think we are over the hill. Today, I am smack in the middle of my forties and of the many things I've learned in the past five years an important one is that being a fortysomething has its challenges. Just as there are 'tweenies'—kids who are no longer toddlers, but are also not quite teens—the forties is a period of life where you find yourself a tad 'in between'.

There's an old French proverb which says: 'Forty is the old age of youth; 50 is the youth of old age'. It's true that as a fortysomething you are certainly not a girlish young woman anymore, but equally you are still a long way from having matronly grace. So what happens in that in-between decade? When the American singer, Melissa Etheridge, turned 40 in 2001 she told the media that it wasn't quite so much, 'Oh, hey I'm turning 40' but more, 'Ok, I'm 40 and look, I have a brand new life'. As I've discovered, she is spot on. Entering this stage of life undoubtedly presents a woman with dilemmas, from what to wear to look good at one end of the

scale, to health concerns which can surface at this age at the other. But becoming a fortysomething also presents us with a fabulous opportunity to take a leaf from Madonna's book and reinvent ourselves—and our lives.

That magazine article I wrote five years ago provided the inspiration to write this book and it has given me the opportunity to explore more areas of life which are important to all women and which can enter a state of flux in the forties. Rather than being a 'must-do' book, however, I prefer to think of it as a 'how-to-if-you-want-to' guide. One of the great things about being a fortysomething is that by now you will likely know what you like and dislike in life and don't care what other people think either way. But, if you are wondering about fighting the signs of ageing, having a late baby, or planning for retirement, I have interviewed a group of highly respected experts from Australia, the USA and the UK to get the best advice and information on these issues and more that affect the fortysomething woman.

As I started writing this book, I saw a cute fridge magnet in a store that read: 'If life begins at 40, what are the years 0-39—a rehearsal?' Whatever your spin on things, the forties doesn't have to be a 'lost' decade, or a time of life too long for days gone by. In fact, it's a magnificent opportunity to take life by the horns and be fabulous—the rehearsals are over and it's time for the main act.

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Fortysomething Skin Care

Protecting, improving and caring for your skin

There used to be a time when I could get up in the morning, wash my face, put on some makeup and go. During my twenties and early thirties, thanks to a hectic career and lifestyle, I was often sleep deprived, skipped breakfast and occasionally broke some of the 10 commandments of beauty—especially going to bed with makeup on. I was also a frequent flyer and often on the road, although it rarely crossed my mind to do anything special to my skin before, after, or during a long haul flight. In fact, my only in-flight 'must-do's' were having enough tapes and batteries for my Walkman and making sure I could see the TV screen to watch all the movies!

As a result, I didn't always look exactly fabulous, but one of the many joys of youth is that most of the time you can get away with being a bit neglectful here and there when it comes to your lifestyle—and even your skin. Since turning 40, however, my new reality is that it is simply harder to just roll out of bed and look great. From my hair to my makeup, I have to put in more effort and looking after my skin has become more important than ever.

Beauty guru Bobbi Brown describes the forties as the 'oh shit' decade—a time

when you first notice you actually look older than you used to. Although the truth hurts, I agree. Every woman wants healthy and youthful-looking skin at any age, but after 40 your skin faces new challenges. And as first impressions of a woman's age are often made from the face she presents to the world, ultimately it's up to you to do the best you can to protect and care for your skin on every level.

Caring for fortysomething skin involves more than just using a miracle cream though. As you age, your physiology is also changing. And if you are planning to enjoy the (older) skin you are in, it's important to understand how your skin ages and be on top of the tools and tricks of the trade you can use to keep your skin looking young and healthy.

How Skin Ages

It's hard not to look at a newborn's skin without gasping in awe. Soft, wrinkle-free and without a single blemish, this is the type of skin we all desire. But the reality is that even a baby's skin doesn't stay that way for long. Your skin starts to hit bumps in the road as early as puberty, turning fresh faces into confused complexions bugged with pimples and acne. And the first signs of environmental wear and tear start to show up in your face as early as your twenties. By your thirties, those subtle expression lines which started forming in the last decade may become more entrenched and in your forties the additional challenges your skin faces include dryness, a lack of elasticity and an uneven tone.

Although your genes do have a hand in how your skin ages—called intrinsic ageing, what's also happening is that over time your skin accumulates damage and the biggest culprits are free radicals. Joseph DiNardo is Executive Vice President and Chief Scientific Officer of Pharma Cosmetix Research in the US and one of the world's leading skin care scientists and product formulators. 'We're not ageing as much as oxidising,' he explains. 'We age from the free radical damage caused by

internal and external sources. Internally, we use oxygen to generate energy, but this process also generates free radicals—highly reactive molecules which cause damage. As we age, our natural cellular antioxidant ubiquinone—also called coenzyme Q10—loses its effectiveness and as a result, free radical damage occurs.'

A large part of what you see when you look in the mirror each morning and frown at your wrinkles is oxidation—in effect, human rusting. Think about it. If you scratch your car and don't cover the mark with paint, it eventually goes rusty. And if you cut an apple in half, it starts to turn brown almost immediately. Both are as a result of oxidation. Making matters worse, a lifestyle which also includes sun exposure, smoking, pollution, a poor diet, stress and drinking too much alcohol, creates even more free radicals and adds to the damage. As a result, your once baby-bottom-like skin becomes dry, rough, slack, wrinkled and discoloured. And there's more. There are also things happening to your skin which you can't see—what lies below the skin's surface—including a slowing down in the production of essential collagen, elastin and hyaluronic acid.

Wrinkles and Other Nasties

For most fortysomething women, their main area of concern is the development of wrinkles. But there are a number of other skin issues which can be problematic at this age. If you have oily skin, however, you may find ageing a bit of a relief, as your skin is likely to become drier with each decade. But if you have dry skin, your problem will only get worse with every birthday. And, as dry skin is also more prone to wrinkling, fine lines may appear earlier and be more defined. But there are other issues to contend with beyond dryness. Dr Leslie Baumann, Chief of the Division of Cosmetic Dermatology and a Professor of Dermatology at the University of Miami School of Medicine in Florida, explains, 'Women in their forties can also experience dark patches on their skin from sun exposure. But other

common problems include skin allergies to cosmetics or cosmetic ingredients and also adult acne thanks to hormone fluctuations—mainly a decrease in estrogen and increase in androgens.’

Mild acne can be troublesome, but is usually limited to just whiteheads and blackheads and doesn’t cover a large area of the face—it can be just the same as when you were in your teens. This type of acne doesn’t usually need medical attention; a good skincare regime, coupled with the use of over-the-counter products containing ingredients such as salicylic acid, benzoyl peroxide and alpha hydroxy acids can be used to effectively control it. Moderate acne, however, is likely to be more widespread and may include small, painful cysts in the skin. If over-the-counter products and a good skincare regime don’t work, topical antibiotics, vitamin A derivatives and oral antibiotics are often the next plan of attack. For this, you will need to consult a doctor. The Pill can also sometimes be used successfully to treat problem skin in your teens and early twenties, but this may not be an option for a fortysomething women because of a higher risk of a thrombosis (blood clot). Severe or cystic acne is best handled by a dermatologist; not only is the risk of scarring high, but it often involves treatment using a powerful prescription drug called isotretinoin, which has to be monitored carefully because of possible side effects.

Another distressing skin problem which is common in fortysomething women is rosacea, a disorder which, according to the National Rosacea Society, affects an estimated 14 million Americans alone. Rosacea looks like acne, with the most common symptoms being facial redness and inflammation across the flushing zone (the nose, cheeks, chin and forehead), visibly dilated blood vessels, facial swelling and burning sensations and inflamed spots. The disorder can start out as mild episodes of facial blushing or flushing, but over time may lead to a permanently red face which can be distressing. The causes of rosacea are not clearly understood and therefore it cannot be cured but it can be managed with treatment including topical therapy

and oral antibiotics. This is another condition for which you should seek help from a professional—don’t self-diagnose.

Dr Baumann’s advice regarding sudden skin problems in your forties is not to wait too long to seek help. ‘Certain skin types have very little need to see a doctor, while others can really benefit from the prescription medicines, light treatments and other procedures doctors can provide,’ she says. ‘If you have real concerns about your skin, get expert help.’



Special Tip: You Are An Individual and That Includes Your Skin

When was the last time you bought a new skin care product which promised to do wonders for your skin, only to discover it didn’t? Many women fall for the persuasive hype surrounding the latest anti-ageing serum, follow a friend’s recommendation for a ‘swear-by’ exfoliator, or believe that if a moisturiser costs that much it just has to be good. Then why are some women still plagued with skin problems?

A common misconception is that many women are guilty of doing too much to their skin, way more than the traditional cleanse-tone-moisturise of days gone by. But a more likely reason for skin problems is that you probably don’t know your skin as well as you think you do—and are doing the wrong things for it. ‘When it comes to skin care, most people wander through a maze of product misinformation and overzealous marketing, lucky to stumble on anything that works,’ says Dr Baumann. ‘I see a lot of people in my clinic doing the wrong thing for their skin. They spend a lot of time and money using the wrong products and get frustrated because they don’t get the results they hoped for—which is great looking skin.’

The theory that a woman’s skin falls into one of four simplistic categories—normal, dry, combination or sensitive—has been around for years. In fact, it was devised by the cosmetics giant, Helena Rubenstein, way back in the early 1900s.