

Dressing Right Helps You Lose Weight

By Charles Stuart Platkin, J.D. M.P.H.

People are always asking how to increase their chances of losing weight. Recent research suggests that boosting your self-confidence can help. If you feel self-conscious about your weight, it can keep you from taking the initiative to change your habits. However, there is a way to get motivated and look thinner right now: dress the part. Yes, simply looking fitter can actually help you get fitter.



FOR WOMEN:

DON'T RUN AND HIDE

If you've been hiding under oversized, baggy clothes, stop. "You just end up looking big and shapeless," says Glamour magazine contributing fashion editor Kevin Lennox. If you're trying to disappear inside extra-large shirts, you're getting trapped in a vicious cycle. "Big button-down shirts make you look large and encourage a sense of despair," warns Lennox. "Pretty soon, you'll just stop caring."

ADD A LITTLE FLARE

To elongate your legs, stick to jeans that make it all the way to the foot, and look for a little flare at the ankle. For more emphasis, Lennox suggests having a tailor taper the pants at the knee. This focuses attention on the shape and gives the impression of a longer, leaner leg. Avoid tapered pants that form a V shape from ankle to waist.

BELOW THE BELT

The waistband of your jeans shouldn't hit the top of your waist. High-waisted pants draw attention to pear-shaped or curvy figures by accentuating the midriff and the hips. Instead, Lennox recommends pants that rest below your natural waist, around the bellybutton. "Not super low, just slightly closer to your hips. It will minimize your belly."

PICKING POCKETS

According to Lennox, the right pocket is key to finding a flattering look. "If the pocket is too far down, it looks as though you purchased jeans that are too small and your butt is pushing the pocket down." Instead Lennox recommends "big pockets with higher placement to shape and define your butt. They should be towards the top or center."

BARE ESSENTIALS

Bulky clothes and excessive layers add girth where you don't want it. Get back to the basics -- clean, straight lines, simple, dark colors, subtle styles. V-necks and low-cut shirts take the emphasis off the bust. To add flavor without getting lost in layers, simply accessorize, says Sharon Haver, founder of www.focusonstyle.com.

BALANCING ACT

Sometimes the key to minimizing one aspect of your body is to play up another. "If you find yourself getting bottom heavy, wear tops with broader shoulders to appear more visually in sync," advises Haver. You can even invest in some shoulder pads to accentuate your upper half.

THE COLOR WHEEL

Just as dark colors minimize areas where you have the least confidence, a contrasting lighter color draws attention to aspects of your body that you do feel proud of. A light scarf worn with a dark outfit accentuates your face and distracts from your figure.

FOR MEN:

MORE ON COLOR

While a combination of dark clothes (dark suit, dark shirt) is slenderizing, adding a colorful accent draws attention to your face -- while drawing the eye away from a spare tire. Also, "Large designs, like plaids, focus on girth not length, whereas a small pattern or no pattern emphasizes thinness. Keep in mind, heavier fabrics (tweed, flannel, bulky sweaters) give the impression of a heavier body. Light- to medium-weight fabrics (cotton, twill, linen) visually remove pounds," says Andy Gilchrist, author of *The Encyclopedia of Men's Clothes* and editor of www.askandyaboutclothes.com.

SLACKING OFF

Men who want to disguise their stomachs should steer clear of flat-front pants, which draw unwanted attention to the midriff. Opt instead for pleated slacks, especially pants with one or two pleats. "Wear your pants on your natural waist, in line with your bellybutton," advises Gilchrist. "Wearing your pants under the belly just highlights it."

KEEP OUT

Gilchrist also advises men to avoid carrying anything in their pockets. "Not just big guys, either. Clean out your billfold. If you still have lots of stuff you just can't do without, buy two thin wallets and carry one in each of your front trousers pockets."

BOTTOMED-OUT

The hands-down best choice for men's sweaters is flat-bottom casual without any ribbing at the bottom. They don't grip the waist and they don't bulge -- but they do disguise the stomach area. If you must buy a banded-bottom sweater, look for one with a generous cut or consider a bigger size.

FIT AND FITTED

Avoid fitted dress shirts. Opt for shirts that leave plenty of room for movement and comfort. As for jackets, Gilchrist advises, "Slanted, flapless pockets add to the vertical look. Avoid extra width in lapels, and look for ventless jackets if you're wide in the rear, as the side vents can also emphasize wideness."

INVESTIGATING ACCESSORIES

Vests that match your suit can work nicely, but avoid any color contrast. As Gilchrist warns, "Contrasting vests draw attention to your middle." Belt buckles can also be pitfalls -- you don't want anything too bulky to highlight your gut. And stick to thin-soled, dark shoes -- nothing too clumsy or awkward.

TAILORING TIPS

The best idea is to buy big and take it in -- that way you can get custom-made clothes that show off exactly what you want people to see and camouflage exactly what you want them to forget.

BOTTOM LINE

For both men and women, there's one classic tip: Vertical lines are slimming, and horizontal lines ... well, they're not. Stick to vertical -- the thinner the line, the thinner you'll look.