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Our Field Guide To The 5 Types Of Wrinkles + How To Soften & Care For Them

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Wrinkles will happen to us all at some point, but let's try to reframe the point of view. Got smile lines etched in your nasolabial folds? You must have grown up with lots of long belly laughs. Notice the oft-dreaded "11s" in the middle of your forehead? You've likely engaged in plenty of thought-provoking conversations, ones that made your brows furrow. A rich life full of emotions, stories, and beauty—so what if you have a few fine lines?

Now, while wrinkles are ultimately inevitable (and shouldn't be feared), they do signal skin changes and sometimes damage of some sort—and if the creases start to crop up earlier than you'd like, you can attempt to smooth those lines with some targeted tips. But wait: Different types of wrinkles have (slightly) different causes—so you can't exactly soften them all in one fell swoop.

Curious about the different types of wrinkles? Consider the below your handy guide.

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Why wrinkles happen.

Wrinkles fall into two categories: Ones that crop up from constant muscle movements, and ones that linger due to skin thinning and loss of elasticity—or in more technical terms, dynamic versus static wrinkles.

Dynamic wrinkles

Dynamic wrinkles occur from facial movement, like expressing emotion. Anyone can have them, no matter their age (ever notice how the skin around your eyes tends to crinkle when you laugh or smile?). "Examples include the frown lines (often referred to as the 11s) between the brows, forehead wrinkles, crow's feet, lip lines (when you drink from a straw or purse your lips), and smile lines on the mid-cheek," says board-certified dermatologist Cynthia Bailey, M.D., founder of [Dr. Bailey Skin Care](#). "Over time, these lines will deepen and etch into the skin, similar to the way folding paper will leave a crease."

Static wrinkles

When dynamic wrinkles start to stick around, they convert to static wrinkles—or fine lines that are present all the time. "Static wrinkles remain even when you are at rest and your facial muscles are relaxed," notes board-certified dermatologist [Shereene Idriss, M.D.](#) As your skin thins and collagen levels dwindle with age, it becomes more difficult for it to rebound to its original shape—and, thus, those fine lines start to settle in.

"Examples include the marionette lines from the edge of the mouth to the jaw, nasolabial folds from the sides of the nose to the corners of the mouth, cheek lines behind the smile lines, neck, and under-chin lines," adds Bailey.

Types of wrinkles.

Within those two parent categories, you have more specific types of lines with slightly different causes. Stay with us here—things are about to get technical.

1. Expression wrinkles

"Expression wrinkles happen when underlying facial muscles are activated to create facial expressions," Bailey notes. Think laughing, smiling, frowning—you get the idea. Now, it's not necessarily the movement that's the problem—creases and lines are part of a well-functioning face—but as you lose vital skin components like collagen, your skin isn't as able to bounce back from these movements.

2. Elastotic wrinkles

Elastotic wrinkles have to do with the skin's elasticity (hence its name), and it results in a leathery, crepey appearance. UV rays are the [main culprit for this type of wrinkle](#), as they damage the underlying elastic structure in the skin and cause those fine, tissue-like creases.

Ready for a biology moment? "When elastotic skin is viewed under the microscope, there are clumps of 'elastotic' material in the superficial portion of the dermis [aka, the second layer of the skin where your collagen resides] instead of the nice spaghetti-like strands of healthy

the skin where your collagen resides] instead of the nice spaghetti-like strands of healthy collagen and elastin fibers," Bailey explains. "Elastotic material has a dull, sallow color that can be seen through the skin with the naked eye and contributes to a sallow look to skin. It may also appear lumpy, giving the skin a cobblestone or crepey appearance."

3. Gravitational wrinkles

Eventually, the effects of gravity afflict us all. Over time, your skin just sags, and there you have it: gravitational wrinkles. "The most classic example is the marionette lines around the mouth area, which appear as your cheeks begin to sag," says Idriss.

4. Compression wrinkles

Compression wrinkles (also called sleep wrinkles or pillow lines) happen when you squish your face into your pillow while you sleep. After all, if you sleep with your face smashed into the pillow for eight or so hours each night, that's quite a long time for the delicate skin on your face to endure that pressure.

As you grow older and your collagen levels start to decline, you may notice those lines stick around well after midmorning. Says Bailey: "Similar to dynamic wrinkles, they will deepen over time with repetition as skin thins and elasticity wains with both age and sun damage."

5. Atrophic wrinkles

Atrophic wrinkles are similar to elastotic in that they form due to the breakdown of your skin's elastic structure, typically from sun damage and as you age. "They are associated with crepey skin texture and deepening of dynamic, static, and gravitational wrinkles," says Bailey. "This happens to all areas of your skin, especially the sun-exposed skin of the face, arms, chest, and back of the hands."

Types of facial wrinkles.

Now, some facial wrinkles have more everyday monikers—you might be more familiar with the below:

1. Crow's feet

A type of expression wrinkle, crow's feet pop up whenever you smile, laugh, or squint. They resemble the talons of a crow, as if one just so happened to plant its feet on the delicate corners of your eyes.

"Crow's feet can be very thin, fine lines, or they can be very heavy and deep," board-certified dermatologist [Jeanine Downie, M.D.](#), once told us [about this type of wrinkle](#), but you can identify them from their placement: The crinkled edges will radiate from the corners of the eyes.

Read all about crow's feet [here](#).

2. Under-eye wrinkles

These can include crow's feet, but under-eye wrinkles extend to the entire orbital area—since the skin there is super thin, it's one of the first to show signs of aging. As board-certified dermatologist and founder of [MMSkincare Ellen Marmur, M.D.](#), once told mbg [about under-eye wrinkles](#), there are over 10 muscles around our eyes squinting, smiling, and expressing—constantly contracting those muscles can create wrinkles.

Learn more about under-eye wrinkles [here](#).

3. Smile lines

Smile lines (also referred to as "laugh lines," or "marionette lines") extend from the sides of your nose and curve around your mouth. If you smile in the mirror, they're the lines that appear like a pair of stretched-out closed parentheses.

Another type of expression wrinkle, these form by, well, smiling or laughing. "Laugh lines are formed by the constant use of the orbicularis oris muscle, which allows us the ability to speak," says aesthetic registered nurse Neethi Masur, R.N., at [SKINNEY MedSpa](#). "Over time as we age, the skin protecting this muscle becomes stretched, creating laxity, increasing the appearance of these folds."

However, they also fall under the gravitational wrinkles bucket: "Our facial fat pads of the cheek fall toward the jowls, hollowing out the lower cheek and contributing to marionette lines and lateral cheek wrinkles," notes Bailey.

Read more about smile lines [here](#).

4. Chest wrinkles

Chest wrinkles are a mixture of compression and atrophic wrinkles—because the skin on your décolletage is so thin (underratedly so), it's quite vulnerable to UV damage, dry weather, and other environmental aggressors. And thus, it's a common area for crepey, paper-like skin.

[Sleep wrinkles](#) also tend to crop up in this area, especially if you're a side or stomach sleeper. "Chest skin [is] dragged along with breast tissue, much like a garment that is placed for long periods in a badly folded configuration," board-certified dermatologist [Loretta Ciraldo, M.D., FAAD](#), once [told mbg](#).

Our full guide to chest wrinkles is [here](#).

5. Forehead lines

Forehead wrinkles, another type of expression wrinkle, manifest as horizontal etches from raising your brows or vertical lines from furrowing them together (also known as the "11s"). Again, it's not the movement itself that's the issue—but when your skin's structural components start to break down, those lines tend to stick around.

See [here](#) for tips to tend to forehead lines.

6. Neck wrinkles

Neck wrinkles, also known as "tech neck," can either look like deeper horizontal lines that wrap around like a choker or smaller, thinner, lighter lines that are more prevalent on the sides. As for the cause? It seems to be a blend of compression, gravitational, and atrophic or elastotic wrinkles.

See, "The neck can capture a lot of sun damage, particularly on the sides and lower portion," notes board-certified dermatologist [Jeremy Fenton, M.D.](#), of Schweiger Dermatology Group in NYC and Long Beach, New York, which makes the neck a prime spot for crepey skin to settle in.

But movement also comes into play: "We get horizontal lines in the neck due to the bending of the neck to look down," Fenton continues. That's where the modern phrase "tech neck" was born: "People are noting more of this now that we spend more time looking down at our screens," he says. "You can get the deep lines that are horizontal and run across the front of the neck from the bending, or flexion, of the neck."

If you're curious about neck wrinkles, [here's our full guide](#).

How to address the different types of wrinkles head-on:

I. Wear SPF.

"The best treatment is always prevention, starting with sun protection! Protect your skin from the harmful effects UV rays can have on the quality of your elastic tissue," says Idriss.

Bailey seconds the advice: "Sun protection is critical since up to 80% of the signs of skin aging—including thinning and loss of elasticity—are due to UV damage," she adds. Find a sunscreen you love (our favorites, [here](#)), slather on, and be smart about your time in the sun (because sun protection is far more than a bottle of SPF).

Although, you might want to snag a broad-spectrum bottle that protects against both UVB and UVA rays—the latter can penetrate more deeply into the dermal layer and damage collagen; research has even found that UVA rays are the main contributor to photoaging. (Read all about UVB versus UVA rays [here](#).)

2. Protect with antioxidants.

"Topical antioxidant skin care products help to [neutralize free radicals in cells] that lead to skin aging and loss of elasticity," Bailey notes. (Think vitamin C, niacinamide, CoQ10, etc.) You could also help support your body's natural antioxidant defenses with targeted supplements—capsules with astaxanthin, in particular, have been shown to reduce wrinkles in as little as six weeks.* Plus, when consumed, antioxidants can help buffer the skin against photoaging by both absorbing UV rays and helping neutralize UV-induced oxidative stress.*

3. Use smart topicals.

"Treatments that increase skin thickness can soften the appearance of atrophic wrinkles, including skin care that stimulates collagen renewal on a molecular level, such as retinoids and glycolic acid." (Or lactic acid, if your skin is sensitive to the more intense AHA.)

Both beloved ingredients encourage cell turnover, provide exfoliation, and help support collagen production to replenish a smoother skin texture. If you're new to these ingredients (or if you're applying them to a new area), make sure to patch test before smearing all over your skin. It's also important to note that retinoids and acids can make your skin more photosensitive, which only reinforces the importance of sun protection in point No. 1.

4. Promote collagen production.

Considering wrinkles happen when our skin's structural components (like collagen) start to break down, it can be helpful to support your body's natural collagen production—specifically, with hydrolyzed collagen supplements.* "It can attenuate skin wrinkling, providing the skin one of its basic ingredients to stay firm and taut,"* says Taz Bhatia, M.D., an integrative medicine physician and mbg Collective member. In fact, studies have shown that taking collagen peptides will support skin elasticity and hydration levels and promote youthful texture.*

See [here](#) for our all-time favorite collagen supplements to choose from.

5. Hydrate.

Keeping the skin well-moisturized not only improves barrier function overall but can "plump" up skin and ease the appearance of lines. As for specific ingredients, we at mbg are quick to sing the praises of ceramides, aloe, and hyaluronic acid. "You can use products with hyaluronic acid in order to plump the skin," Nicole Hatfield, a certified esthetician for [Pomp](#) and founder of [Radiant Beings Wellness & Beauty Coaching](#), previously [told us](#). (Find our favorite HA serums [here](#), if you're in the market.)

6. Monitor your movements.

"Avoiding unnecessary facial expressions is another method," says Masur. "Of course live your life to the fullest, but if you are at home, resting the muscles on your face helps, especially when throughout the day the mouth is in constant motion." Essentially? We're certainly not going to tell you to stop laughing, but perhaps consider how you are resting your face when not actively engaging.

You could even try [face yoga](#), where you intentionally isolate and tone your face muscles for tighter, more toned skin.

7. Sleep on your back.

For compression wrinkles in particular: "If you are one of those rare specimens who can control your sleep position while sleeping, then more power to you!" Idriss once told us about [avoiding chest wrinkles](#). "Sleeping on your back will definitely slow the rate of progression of lines on your chest." It's certainly not the be-all and end-all (stomach sleepers, you're not doomed to a life of premature chest folds), but it does help delay the onset a bit.

You can always try a weighted blanket to keep from curling up in bed or invest in some [silk sheets](#)—the fabric prevents friction and provides some slip for delicate skin.

8. Opt for in-office treatments.

You may also go the in-office route, if you so choose. For crepeyness, try to opt for skin-resurfacing treatments, like professional microneedling—this can improve skin texture by using small needles to prick the skin, triggering collagen repair. "Collagen renewal as part of healing after laser treatments and chemical peels also helps reduce the appearance of atrophic wrinkles," says Bailey. Just always make sure to see a professional you trust for these kinds of treatments.

The takeaway.

Here, we've included everything you've ever wanted to know about the types of wrinkles, all wrapped up in one handy guide. Whether you want to ensure your skin looks more vibrant long-term or have a specific area of concern you'd like to tend to, now you have targeted tips for each type of crease and fold.

If you are pregnant, breastfeeding, or taking medications, consult with your doctor before starting a supplement routine. It is always optimal to consult with a health care provider when considering what supplements are right for you.

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