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Will I age like MY MOTHER?

Will you become more like your mum as you age? Donna Reeves asks mothers and daughters to compare lifestyle notes and asks an expert if there really is a maternal link to our ageing.

WILL I AGE like my mother? It's a question most of us have asked ourselves, and the answer really is, "it depends". While genetics obviously plays a part in determining the shape of your face and the type of skin you have, your lifestyle is a large factor in how you will age. Unprotected sun exposure in your early years and smoking will hasten the ageing process, with the damage difficult to undo later on. With the help of plastic and reconstructive surgeon, Dr Warwick Nettle of Silkwood Medical Clinic in Sydney, we take a look at the lifestyles of mothers and daughters and seek to answer that age-old question.



Rhondda,
aged 38

CHILDHOOD SUMMERS IN THE SUN

RHONDDA FISHER,
wine-bar co-owner, 60.

A second-generation Australian of Welsh/Irish descent, Rhondda was raised on a farm in Victoria and spent most of her childhood summers "running around half-naked in the scorching sun". She slathered her skin in coconut oil as a teenager to aid tanning, and didn't start using sunscreen until her late teens. She smoked for 20 years but gave up 20 years ago when she was 40. These days, the mother-of-two is careful to protect her skin when she's in the sun. She drinks one or two glasses of red wine daily, and gets her daily exercise when indulging in her favourite hobby, gardening.

ADRIENNE BISCONTIN,
public relations manager, 37.

Like her mother, Adrienne spent a lot of her childhood and teenage years in the sun, often burning her fair skin to a crisp during many visits to the beach. In her late teens Adrienne started to use sunscreen, and since the age of 25 she has worn sunscreen and a hat whenever she's in the sun. She is particularly vigilant about protecting her face, and applies a sunscreen 365 days a year. "I can't believe I used to go out in the sun and just let myself burn," says Adrienne. "With pale skin, I've spent so many hot summer nights sitting with the fan blowing on my red sunburned skin, lathered with aloe vera, suffering. I've learned not to do that any more!"

Adrienne smoked socially during her twenties but quit completely five years ago. She drinks between one and six glasses of wine a week, depending on her social calendar, and exercises three to five times a week. She tries to eat healthily but allows herself a bit of chocolate every day, and despite calling herself a "habitual worrier", says she handles stress well.

AINSLIE FISHER, hair salon owner, 31.

As with her mother and older sister, Ainslie spent her early years in the sun. She loved running through the sprinkler in her bathers and didn't wear sunscreen until the legendary 1980s SLIP, SLOP, SLAP campaign started to make its mark throughout Australia. Following the campaign, Ainslie started to wear sunscreen while in the sun, and after a family friend gave her a facial when she was 12, she began toning and moisturising her skin every night.

These days, Ainslie wears a moisturiser with an SPF every day and tries to avoid being in direct sunlight for more than 30 minutes at a time, partially to avoid her face from freckling. She smokes socially and has done so since she was 18. On the weekends Ainslie might drink a bottle of wine with friends, and may have one drink if she goes out mid-week. Ainslie doesn't do any structured exercise, although as the owner of a busy inner-Melbourne hair salon, working on her feet 10 hours a day keeps her fit.



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From left:
 Adrienne, Ainslie
 and their mum
 Rhondda.



Dr. Nettle says:

"Despite smoking and a high level of sun exposure, Rhondda's skin is not as wrinkly as it might be because she is quite full in the face and neck. As a lot of facial ageing relates to facial fat loss and progressive skeletonisation, Rhondda's fullness helps her look a little younger than her age.

"Both Ainslie and Adrienne had a lot of sun as youngsters, which, with their English-Welsh heritage, is likely to play havoc with their skin in years to come. Most of these changes generally show up after age 35 to 40, and we see more in Adrienne than Ainslie at the moment, as she is the oldest.

"Both daughters may well age exactly as their mother, as structurally all three have similar faces – the main difference is that Rhondda has a little extra weight. As a rule, thin skin wrinkles and thick skin sags, so if the daughters can keep their weight under control they should age well."

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THE ENGLISH ROSE

CHRISTINA BROOKS, executive secretary, 66.

Christina was born in England and has always loved the sun. She took every opportunity to sunbathe, which, being in England, wasn't all that often. Christina used 'sun tan' cream in England although it's not clear whether this offered any protection. When Christina immigrated to Australia at age 20, she went to the beach frequently and only stopped about eight years ago. As soon as sunscreens became widely publicised, she began using them.

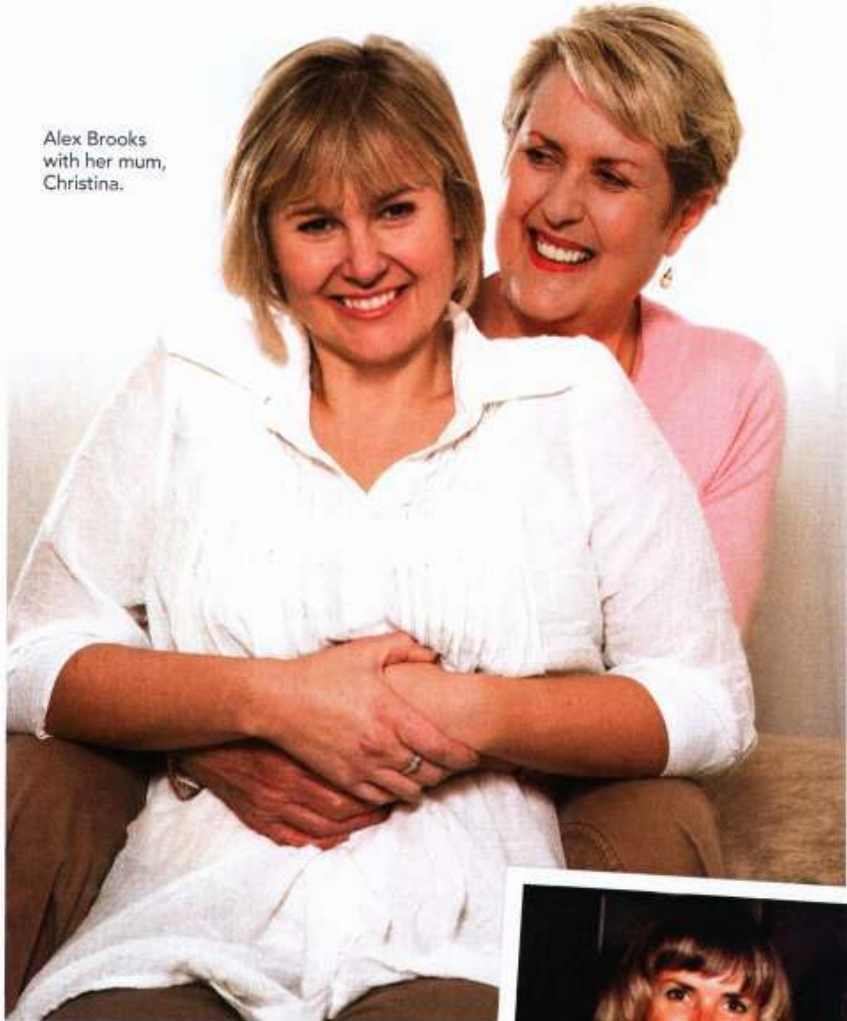
Christina has never smoked. She drinks one 100ml glass of red or white wine each night with dinner. Her diet is healthy, including three meals a day with no snacking. She drinks a cup of green tea in the morning and two skinny cappuccinos at work, and water throughout the day. While she says she is fairly lazy, Christine walks the two kilometres to her work once a week and does yoga once a week. As she's aged, Christina has found it difficult to sleep, although herbal remedies, the occasional prescription medication and audio books tend to help.

ALEX BROOKS, journalist, author and mother of two, 38.

Alex was born in Australia to English parents. She spent plenty of time in the backyard and at the beach in the glaring sun, but says her mum was one of only a few parents at the time who insisted their children wear sunscreen, even if it was only factor six or eight. Alex says she remembers watching her dad lather himself with factor 15+ and thinking, 'he'll never get a tan if he wears that'. These days, Alex says she's mostly chained to a computer indoors, although she walks and swims outdoors at least three times a week.

Alex has never smoked and might have two or three glasses of wine with dinner if she's stressed. She averages about one big night a month where she will drink more. Since separating from her husband two years ago, Alex says she sleeps fantastically and although she says she has issues with anxiety, she does yoga and meditation to help her deal with it.

Alex Brooks with her mum, Christina.



Dr. Nettle says

"Christina and Alex are the closest example of a mother-daughter couple where Alex looks destined to age exactly as her mother. This is for structural reasons – they both have about the same size face and their bone structure is strikingly similar. Their skin is of medium thickness and so they are likely to get the same sags and wrinkles, as is evidenced by the nasolabial creases they both have.

"Christina has deeper labiomandibular creases [marionette lines from corners of the mouth down to the chin] than Alex, but these are simply the effect of time and gravity. Christina has a fuller neck, but this is quite possible for Alex, too, if she puts on weight in middle age.

"Alex can prevent some of these ageing characteristics by continuing to exercise, preventing weight gain and thereby fullness of the neck. She can also reduce her chances of mid-face collapse by taking good care of her teeth, and avoiding unnecessary dental extractions."



PHOTOGRAPHY: ALEX JENNINGS HAIR & MAKE-UP: MELANIE BURNICLE



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A BONDI CHILDHOOD

KERRIE LEE, journalist and archaeology honours student, 62.

Mother-of-three Kerrie Lee has an Irish/English background. Her mother had olive skin, but Kerrie took after her father, inheriting his fair skin. As a child, she practically lived at Bondi Beach. Although her mother insisted she wear a hat and zinc cream on her nose, when Kerrie was at the beach on her own she would use olive oil or baby oil, and continued to spend time in the sun (albeit with sunscreen) until her forties.



Kerrie, aged 23

These days, Kerrie spends very little time in the sun and always wears long sleeves and a hat. She has had a number of sun spots removed from her face, arms and hands.

Kerrie drinks three glasses of wine four or five times a week, and smoked for 12 years, starting when she was 16. She has lost about eight kilograms over the past few years as a result of eating well and regular exercise. For most of her life she has been a chronic insomniac, but recently has been sleeping better.

BRYDIE LEE-KENNEDY, actor and creative director of an independent theatre company, 23.

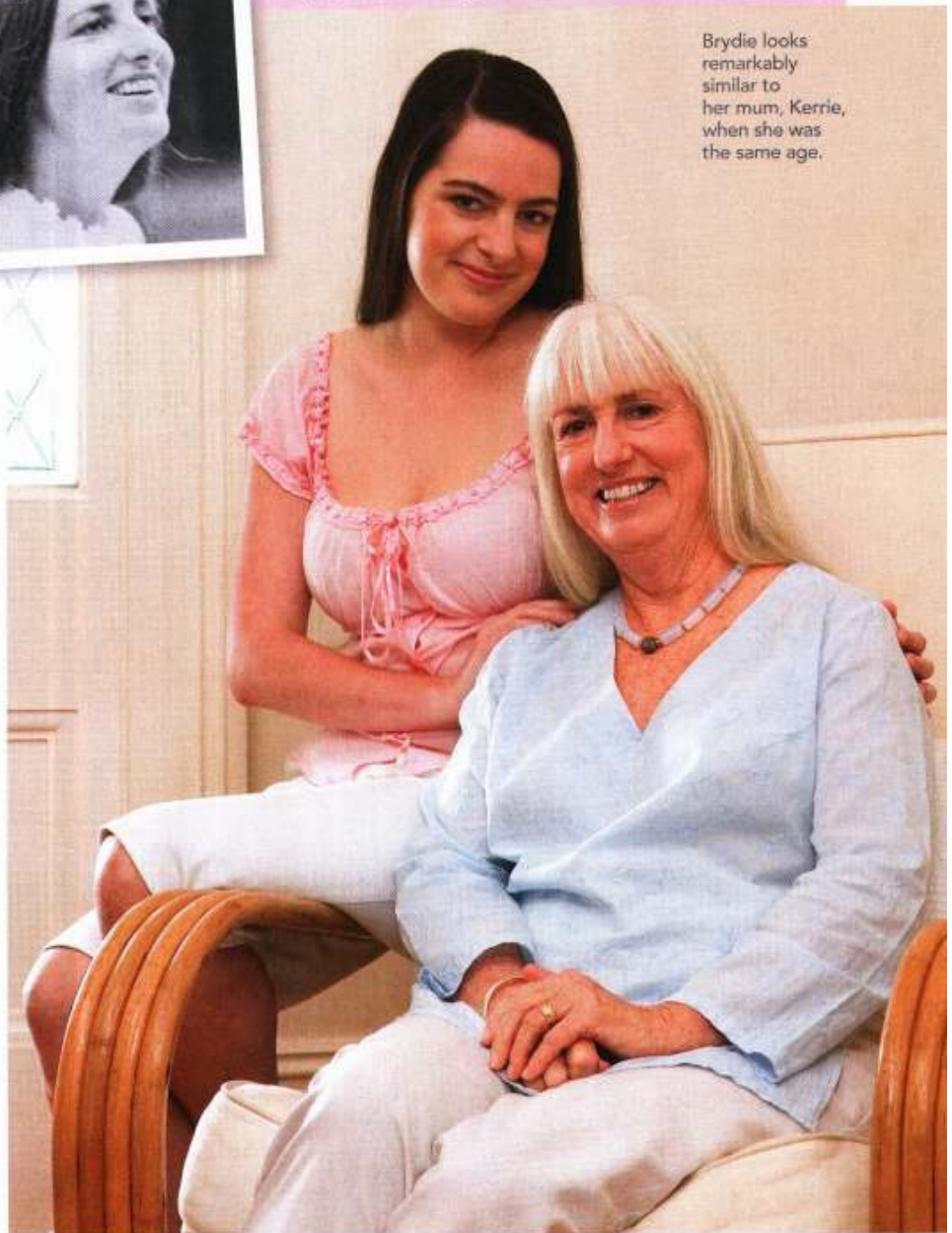
Growing up near the beach, Brydie has spent a lot of time in the sun, but unlike her mother, she has always worn sunscreen in an effort to protect her skin. She was a light social smoker immediately after she left school, but no longer smokes.

Because she has polycystic ovarian syndrome, Brydie follows a healthy low-GI diet to keep her insulin levels under control. She exercises three times a week and has three alcoholic drinks about five times a week. Because of her work in theatre, Brydie is often rehearsing or performing at night so she has irregular sleeping patterns as well as times when she experiences a high level of stress.

Dr. Nettle says

"Kerrie and Brydie both have a similar facial structure. Kerrie's skin shows evidence of sun damage due primarily to early sun exposure, which has resulted in some wrinkling and pigmentation. She goes to the gym, but the early days of burning her fair skin have taken their toll.

"Brydie is only 23. She has had a lot of sun but she did at least have some protection by using sunscreen. Facial ageing, while it starts at about age 16, rarely shows on a person's face until their early thirties, so currently Brydie looks very youthful. She has good skin, the fullness of youth, and a well structured mid-face, jaw line and neck. If she continues to exercise, use sensible sun precautions, doesn't smoke and maintains a steady, moderate weight, she should age well."



Brydie looks remarkably similar to her mum, Kerrie, when she was the same age.

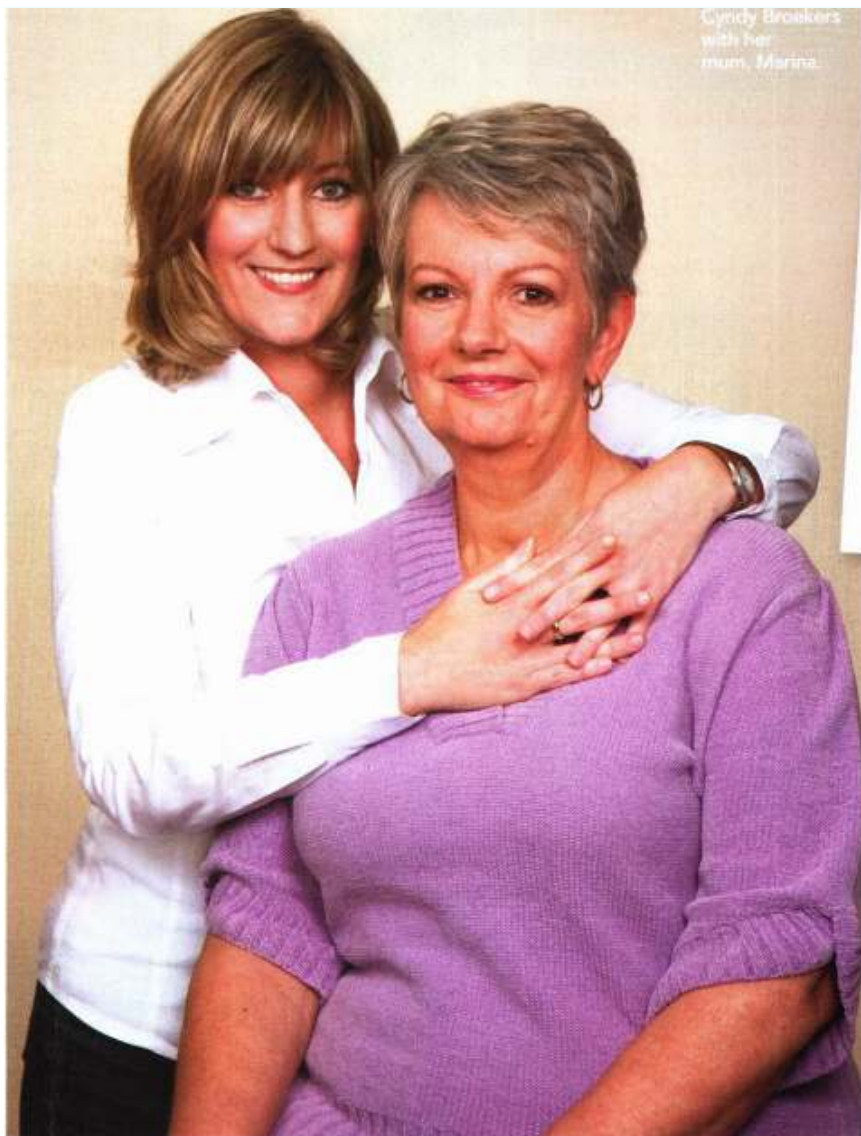


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Cyndy Broekers with her mum, Marina.



Marina, aged 40

Dr. Nettle says

"Marina is 60 and spent the first 11 years of her life in Holland, protected from the Australian sun. The most important time to keep out of the intense Australian sun if you are Anglo-European is the first 10 years of your life. This period will lay the foundation for the rest of one's life. Marina's skin appears to be in good shape, but she has nasolabial creases [lines extending from the nose to the outer corners of the mouth], full upper eyelids with some overhang onto the lashes, and jowls. These are structural changes that come with age.

"Her daughter Cyndy grew up in Australia, and despite protecting her skin now, she shows some evidence of accumulated damage to her face, neck and chest, which is possibly more severe than her mother's. Cyndy has a fuller mid-face/cheek area than her mother, but this flattens with age. Her eyelids are likely to age similarly to her mother, and she has a lower brow, so the upper lids will overhang slightly earlier than her mother."

Plastic and reconstructive surgeon Dr. Warwick Nettle specialises in facelift surgery at Silkwood Medical in Sydney (www.silkwoodmedical.com.au). He has worked in the US at the MD Anderson Cancer Centre in Houston, and Manhattan Eye, Ear and Throat Hospital in New York.

A EUROPEAN START

MARINA BROEKERS, sales assistant, 60. Marina was born in Holland and came to Australia when she was 11, where she played outside and went to the beach without wearing sunscreen. While she still spends time in the sun, she is strict about using sunscreen and moisturises regularly. Marina has one alcoholic drink a day, although she might drink up to three on a Saturday evening. She started smoking at 15, but stopped three years ago. She seldom exercises.

CYNDY BROEKERS, HR training coordinator, 39. Cyndy was born in Australia to Dutch

parents. Despite her fair skin, she didn't use sunscreen as a child, although she says she didn't spend a lot of time in the sun and very rarely got burned. These days, Cyndy still spends very little time in the sun and wears sunscreen almost all the time. Occasionally she forgets and says she gets burned on her shoulders and neck about once a year. As a mother of two, Cyndy drinks very moderately – about five drinks a week. She started smoking at 17, quit at 28, but started smoking again at 32. She currently smokes about three cigarettes a day. She rarely exercises. ■

PHOTOGRAPHY: ALEX JENNINGS HAIR & MAKE-UP: MARY DATTY