

Fashion Outlook

What to change your fat 'n' 40 image?

By Barbara DeWitt
Copley News Service

There's a nationwide men's club called Fat 'n' Forty, and the members have their own uniforms.

Variations are allowed, but the usual dress code includes macho man gold chains worn with once trendy, now gaudy print shirts unbuttoned to the navel and stuffed into shiny polyester pants. Other Fat 'n' Forty electives are wide white belts with matching shoes (usually in patent leather and trimmed with a gold chain), vintage Nikes (a forerunner of Reeboks) or dirty tan suede cowboy boots.

Also on the list are brown leather jackets, knit orlon shirts with the chest pocket bulging with mechanical pencils, and Bermuda shorts worn with knee-high dress socks and brown leather oxfords.

Those club members with executive status not only reflect the image but enhance it by wearing their uniforms two sizes too small, so that the pants legs skim the ankle and the side pockets pout out at the hips.

The club membership list is as robust as the members' sizes. Members can be found everywhere, because the qualifications are so simple: Rookie members must be at least 20 pounds overweight and 39 years old.

Still having trouble identifying Fat 'n' Forty members? You'll know one by the wallet that's bulging from the back pocket of his 1970s vintage tan corduroy jeans or his black silk shirt with the wide white tie. Less noticeable will be the member who wears his V-necked cashmere sweater (without a shirt) so tight that it clings to his belly — which is propped by a giant brass belt buckle with a beer logo.

White-collar members have their own style of club tie. Instead of the traditional silk tie with a tiny club insignia, these members favor clip-on bowties, western string ties and cotton bandannas tied around the neck.

Are you getting letters inviting you to join your local chapter of Fat 'n' Forty? Instead of changing your address, change your uniform. Start thinking thin — and dressing thin.

By taking stock of your wardrobe and getting hip to fashion trends, you can drop 10 years and 20 pounds. And you can do it without losing a pound or spending a moment at the gym, say fashion experts.

First, start reading a men's magazine occasionally, and then visit the men's department of a fashion-forward department store once a month to scope out what's new, just like other young and young-thinking men.

But be careful. If a man starts dressing too young, dressing exactly like his teenage son he'll look worse than before, says image consultant Patricia Parker Smith. On the other hand, you've got to stay away from anything too avant-garde, as those styles are usually unkind to an aging body with love handles.

The best look is actually a classic style. Smith reports Traditional clothes with a youthful attitude are often ageless, making it difficult to guess one's age. She suggests quality, natural fabrics, which are kinder to the body (they hang better), especially when they're in the correct size.

Match your shoes, socks, pants and belt, she says, for a taller, leaner look. Wear pants cuffless with some vertical pleating to break the waistline, making sure the pleats fall unbroken down the leg.

Shirts should be loose around the chest and should button easily at the neck. If the neck is too small, it makes the face look even fuller and heavier, she stresses. A collar with longer points is also thinning.

Smith also favors the preppy style of dressing for a youthful ap-

pearance, and she suggests white chino pants, white socks, cordovan loafers and a heavy cotton knit sweater.

Color is something that fashion consultant Jane Mannfolk thinks is an important key to looking younger and thinner. Too many men dress in what she calls the "sparrow syndrome," which is a beige and brown wardrobe. It's a nice, safe and very dull look that doesn't do anything for one's face or body, she explains.

In order to look younger, you've got to start feeling younger, and one of the best ways to accomplish that is to add some youthful touches, says Mannfolk.

Instead of wearing a white shirt, try a soft blue. Instead of wearing suits every day, change into gray slacks and navy blazer or a salt-and-pepper pattern sportsjacket. Add a tie with traditional rep stripes, but in a brighter color. Instead of oxfords, slip into some kiltie mocs, and for sportswear try a classic deck shoe in colored leather worn without socks.

That belt around your waist is also a clue to your age and weight. Older men continue to wear white belts to match those passe white patent shoes and those who have expanded their waistline think nobody will notice their belt, which is cinched to the max.

Everybody notices, Mannfolk smiles, because it cuts the body in half, making it look wider than it really is. To wittle a wide waist loss the old wide white belt and go with a slim red one. For a less sporty look, pick an exotic leather (such as reptile) dress belt. Keep the belt narrow enough to slide through the belt loops easily and long enough to have at least one hole left on the end of it.

Older men can afford solid gold watches, so if you're wearing one, watch out, says Mannfolk. A more youthful style for daytime clothes would be a gold-faced watch with a brown leather band in an exotic skin. For fun, try a Swatch watch, but let that be your only youthful accessory. You'll fail if you've got too many trendy things going on,

such as the watch, argyle socks, a red belt and blue topsiders.

If you're wanting to suit up in something casual but chic, consider jeans (if you're a size 40 waist or bigger, go for pleated, cotton trousers) with an oxford cloth, button-down shirt worn tieless, and a blazer with padded shoulders and slimming side vents or an oversized sweater in a bold, colorful design, suggests Mannfolk.

For the office, exchange your brown suit for navy or charcoal pinstripes, glen plaid or a European-inspired salt-and-pepper pattern. Add a colored shirt (soft blue, pink or gray) with a colorful tie that reaches to your belt buckle and a coordinating (but not matching) pocket square. Leave the tie tacks, bars and ornate cuff links in the jewelry box (along with those gold necklaces) and you'll knock off about a dozen years.

Now that you've cleaned up your fashion image, scrub your face. That day-old beard trend is passe, and long, scruffy beards a la 1960 are old, old, old. So are sideburns and heavy moustaches that droop over the corners of the mouth.

If an abundance of hair is not your problem, admit it, and quit combing your hair from the back to the front. If you can't afford a hair transplant, just keep your hair super short. Remember, it's not the bald spot people notice, but the strange way you're combing your hair, say both Smith and Mannfolk.

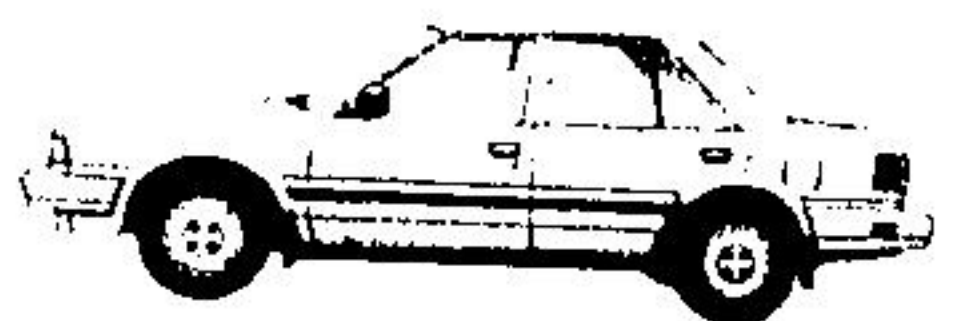


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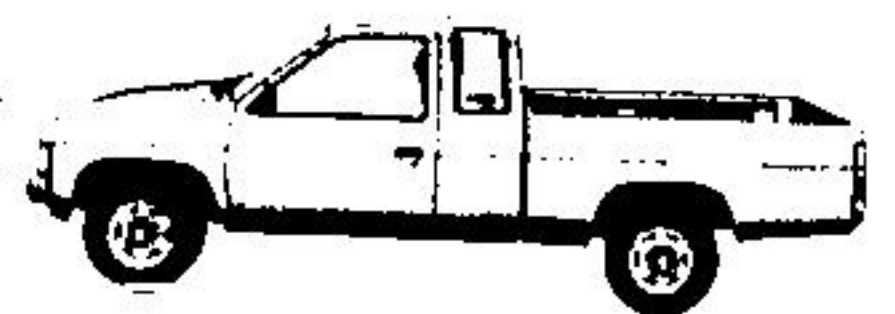


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