

1950s Day Dressing Guide

CLOTHING, ACCESSORIES, SHOES, HAIR, MAKE UP, & MORE



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Overall things:

1. 1950s fashion is fun and much more diverse than 1940s Day fashion. Post-war optimism led to fashion full of grace, style, and individuality! Here are a couple of quick differences:
 - a. Hemlines were raised and more fabric was available to make full skirts and use patterns, colors, and embellishments.
 - b. Denim was introduced as an acceptable fashion staple.
 - c. One's style was based on personal taste rather than economic status.
2. Individuals may select clothing from either of the 1950s fashion binary options as is their preference. As Ashley Cook, owner of Casablanca Vintage, says, *"The fashion is binary; the people may not be."*
3. You don't have to fully dress up. You are allowed to do a version of "1950s Bounding."
 - a. Take the general tips from the makeup, hair, and accessories and incorporate them where you can into your uniform.
 - b. Feminine example: put on some bright red lipstick and pull your hair back in a high ponytail with a ribbon and add a cardigan sweater and/or a string of pearls.
 - c. Masculine example: channel your inner Greaser by slicking back your hair into a ducktail and wear a plain white or black crew neck shirt tucked into a pair of darker jeans.

Have fun!

Feminine:

Clothing:



Separates

- In the 1950s, fashion saw a shift towards separates, with women embracing skirts, blouses, and jackets as versatile building blocks for their wardrobes.
- Separates would always coordinate.
- Stylish 2-piece suits with sculpted lines were also popular as tailoring for women became one of the strongest trends.
 - Jackets of the suits were often rounded at the shoulders, tightly fit through the bodice, and flared out the hips.

Skirts

- Full, swing skirts of plain fabrics or floral prints.
- Worn with crinoline to add volume
- Pencil skirts with high waists, straight hem, and kick pleats that went past the knee.

Pants

- Most popular were “cigarette pants,” which are high waisted, full hips, and skinny fit through the leg that end just above the ankle
- Also, capri pants, which are the shorter (mid-calf) version of cigarette pants grew popularity.
- “Pedal Pushers” had wide legs and stopped at the knee.
- And the 1950s embraced denim! Dark blue jeans entered the scene as long length, capri, and slim fit. The cuffs were thickly rolled up when worn.

Blouses & Tops

- Color was the name of the game in the 1950s: teal, red, baby blue, gingham, small prints, and polka dots.
- Plain colored shirts were adorned with frills, lace, ruffles, and pleats. Small buttons were white or pearl.
- Sleeves: long, short, cap, or sleeveless
- Collars: Peter Pan collars, “classic” pointed collars like men’s dress shirts, round and square portrait collars, cowl collars, boat neck, bow tie collars, tab neck collar, scarf tie collars, wrap top, jewel collars, halter shirts, and of course, party blouses (chiffon, silk, satin, etc.) if you were feeling extra fancy.
- Fabrics: nylon, synthetics, and cotton (if you were poor)



- Fitted, button down tops emerged more in the later 50s with suits. Absolutely NO wrinkles.
- Matching couple shirts became a trend in the later 50s too.
- All shirts should be tucked in and completely buttoned up. No cleavage or midriffs showing.

Cardigans

- Waist-length cardigans were a popular layering piece, adding warmth and style.
- A lighter short sleeve sweater or knit top under a cardigan made for the ultimate sweater set.

Day Dresses



Full skirts and small waists were the silhouette of the 1950s, but the house dress or casual 1950s day dress had more freedoms than going-out dresses.

The look of a homemaker would dress for both style and comfort. The housedress for example would feature a fitted bodice, voluminous skirt and feminine print

Wash and wear fabrics became more available in ready to wear fashion.

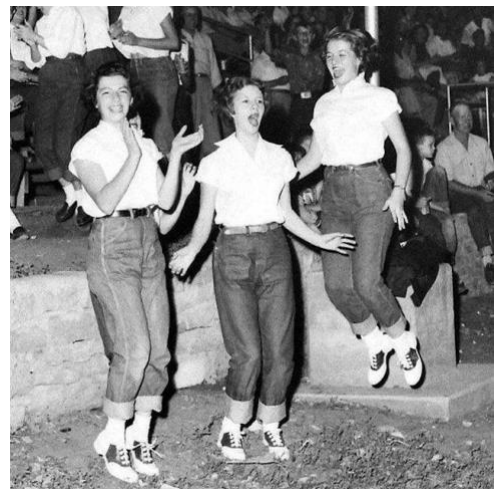
Many looks of the housedress would have elements of cross-over collars, wide sleeves, cinched belts and

pockets.

- The most popular day dress style was the button-down shirtwaist dress with a white collar and cuffs, a favorite style worn by Lucile Ball in *I Love Lucy*.

Notable 1950s styles:

- Greasers
 - Think of Rizzo from the movie *Grease*. This look is based on early Rock and Roll. This style is now often co-opted by Rockabilly fashion.
 - Tops: Structural shirts with a Harrington jacket
 - Bottoms: Circle skirt or dark blue rolled up jeans
 - Accessories: belt and handkerchief
 - Jewelry: medium sized hoop earrings and maybe sunglasses
 - Makeup: dark eye shadow and bright red lip
 - Hair: Pompadour, curls, or ponytails accented with handkerchiefs



- Sock Hop (more of a youthful look)



- If you are still thinking of the movie Grease, this more of Sandy's look for the bulk of the movie.
- Tops: Sweater sets, or crisp coordinating tucked in blouse
- Bottoms: Circle skirts made of felt that had large appliques at the bottom, like poodles on a leash, music notes, or catchy sayings. (Older women sometimes wore these too but with "mature appliques" like the Eiffel tower or martini glasses.)
- Accessories: Minimal but may include scarf tied around the neck
- Shoes: Saddle shoes with folded down bobby socks
- Jewelry: string of pearls
- Makeup: traditional 1950s look
- Hair: ponytail with bangs

- Beatniks

- Based on a literary and social movement started in the early 1950s by a group of writers, including Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac, who were dissatisfied with post-war American culture, the beat aesthetic gained popularity in fashion. Movie reference: Audrey Hepburn in *Funny Face* or even nodded to by "The Beret Girl" in *An Extremely Goofy Movie*.
- Tops: black or striped shirts and black turtlenecks
- Bottoms: pencil skirts and capris
- Accessories: berets and wayfarer glasses
- Shoes: ballet flats
- Jewelry: none
- Makeup: simple, more muted tones
- Hair: short, cropped pixie cut or long and straight (counter cultural) like Bettie Page

Shoes:

- 1950's women's shoes included kitten heel pumps (1-2 inches), slip-on mules, ballet flats, casual moccasins, strappy sandals, Mary Janes, T-straps, loafers, canvas tennis shoes (like Converse, both high and low top), the dramatic stiletto heel (which were 4 inches tall with metal caps and banned at museums!), and, of course, the black and white saddle shoe.
- Black and brown were the main color choices while brighter colors were reserved for the summer or house slippers.

Accessories:

- Belts – Post WWII, Belts were back and worn every single day. Skinny belts and wide cinch belts helped to create the "waspy waist" and keep the blouses tucked in.
- Gloves – a lady wouldn't leave the house without a pair
 - Wrist-length for daytime and longer gloves for the evening
 - Color MUST coordinate with your outfit, including hat and purse



- Handbags – an important element of the outfit to show status and carry items. Most women would have a variety of classic box shapes to match every outfit.
- Glasses/Sunglasses – cat-eye glasses are quintessential to the era
- Hats – The last era of daytimes being widely worn: pillbox styles, large-brimmed sun hats, hats with veils, and fascinators were all popular.
- Hair Accessories – flower clip, bandanas, headscarf, headbands, or comb in the place of a hat
 - Scarves were often worn on the head as both an accessory and a way to keep hair out of the face. They were often in bright colors and patterns. Post-war scarves grew longer and were worn around the neck.

Jewelry

- Necklaces: PEARLS strands and big statement necklaces
- Rings: diamonds and statement rings (think costume jewelry)
- Others: elegant brooches, charm bracelets, and generally gold over silver

Makeup:

- In the 1950s, makeup was not just a form of self-expression but a reflection of the era's polished and glamorous aesthetic.

Face:

- The goal was a complexion that looked natural yet impeccably smooth. This is the era of the "mask effect."
- Foundation was a key part of the makeup process and was applied heavily in natural skin-matching shades, often with warm undertones.
- While blush was a part of makeup routines in the 1950s, it was toned down to a more natural look than the bolder styles of the previous decades. Blush was always in pink or red tones and applied lightly to the apples of the cheek, just enough to add a natural flush back to the face.
- To keep everything set, a light dusting of translucent powder was essential in the '50s.



Lips:

- Red lipstick was worn often during the 1950s, during the war it was seen as patriotic, and was still just as popular post-war.
- Additionally, matte reds and pinks were the most popular lipstick colors, the hue was often chosen based on what matched best with hair color.
- Liner was used to make lips a defined, voluptuous, round shape. (Think Marilyn Monroe)

Eyes:

- Eyeshadows were mostly used sparingly in one color, brushed along the entire lid, then blended outward. The colors were typically matte and subdued, with colors like taupe, soft grey, and muted blue being popular.
- Eyeliner came in black, brown, gray, blue, and purple and was often applied to the upper lid with a winged edge in a cat eye style.
- Mascara became a sign of the ultra-feminine look and was applied heavily in black, brown, and blue to the upper lashes.
- In a departure from previous decades, eyebrow styles in the 1950s became fuller and darker. Brows were penciled in thick with a darker shade than the natural hair and styled to create a defined arch.

Nails:

- Typically, nails were painted in shades of red or pink, sporting a glossy finish that matched the lipstick.
- The preferred shapes were oval or round, keeping the nails looking natural and conservative.

Hair:

- 1950s hairstyles were shorter and required far less work than decades before. As with everything else fashion in the 1950s, individuality was the name of the game.
- Bangs – very short and worn with any hair length
- Short hair
 - Poodle Clip
 - Took 125 curlers per washing!
 - Perfect for those with naturally curly (2c, 3, 4a) hair
 - The Italian Haircut – slightly longer and face framing than Poodle with tousled curls vs tight curls (Generally only pulled off my dark-haired ladies)
 - Soft Bob – modest volume with rolled curls all over. It often had a part and was shaped to frame the women's face.
 - Bouffant -- hair was set in large mesh rollers or empty juice cans, air dried and backcombed/ teased to create height on the top and sides.
 - Pixie Cut – The Audrey Hepburn special!
- Medium Hair
 - The Side Part -- mostly straight hair involved a single length cut with a curved shape around the face and a deep side part. The length varied from chin to shoulders.



- Pageboy – The general shape was that of straight flat hair on the top and sides, with a tightly rolled bottom and front edges facing the neck. The rolls could fall from ear to neck or be one length at the shoulder only.

- Long Hair



- Ponytail -- Hair for the ponytail was usually curled under first, then pulled back, giving it soft rolled edges. Elastic bands were often covered with a thin ribbon bow or pretty hair clip.
- The Hollywood Pin Up -- 1950s long hairstyles involved very full curls all over or a sleek top with cascading curls to one side
- Chignon and Braids – Front hair was styled into soft curls, a deep side part, or long wave, while the back was arranged in a low bun, cluster of curls, braid, or twisted ropes. Many chignons, twists, or braids were arranged up the back of the head and flattened. From the front, it was not obvious a woman had long hair. Only from the back was it seen that her hair was gathered up.

- Black/African American Hairstyles

- As 4C hair wasn't deemed culturally acceptable at the time, many women still choose to straighten their hair and then curl it to achieve similar styles to white women.
- Wigs, like in this photo, also grew in popularity and were easier to wear.



Resources:

- <https://www.centralcasting.com/1950s-fashion-for-men-women/>
- <https://vintagedancer.com/1950s/>
- <https://recollections.biz/blog/1950s-accessories/>
- <https://vintagedancer.com/1950s/1950s-accessories-belts-gloves-head-scarf/>
- <https://www.whitevictoria.com/blog/what-jewelry-was-popular-in-the-1950s.html#:~:text=The%201950s%20were%20epitome%20classy,and%20glamour%20were%20all%20around.>
- <https://www.vintage-retro.com/1950s-fashion-guide-to-1950s-womens-accessories/>
- <https://hair-and-makeup-artist.com/womens-1950s-makeup/>
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- <https://www.centralcasting.com/background-actors-guide-1950s-makeup/>
- <https://www.treasurehouseofmakeup.co.uk/blog/1950s-makeup/>
- <https://frockflicks.com/how-contemporary-hairstyles-affect-historical-costume-movies-the-1950s/>
- <https://vintagedancer.com/1950s/1950s-hairstyles/>

Masculine:

Clothing



Suits

- Still everyday wear. “The Man in the Gray Suit” was a thing.
- Suits were narrower, straighter, and less fussy. Blues, greens, burgundy, and khaki hues expanded in the later half of the 50s as people became bolder with their colors (but still mostly worn in sports jackets after work). Fabrics were heavier, like wool, flannels, or mohair to ensure there were no wrinkles.
- Men began to gravitate more towards the single-breasted suits than the double-breasted suits.
- Instead of a vest that matched the coat, it became increasingly popular to wear vests in complimentary or contrasting colors in materials like corduroy, silk, and velvet. Vest could also be skipped.
- Suit pants were wider legged and pressed with a front crease and were more often worn higher on the waist. All pants were worn with skinny belts, but some pants even had an attached belt in the matching fabric.
- Dress Shirts – collars were shorter, straighter, and with rounded corners. The length of collars is like today’s men’s dress shirts, or a tad longer. Colors were generally white or light blue, but more colors were added as the decade continued. They were always worn tucked in.
- Short Sleeve Dress Shirts – new this decade was the short-sleeved version of the professional standard.

Casual/Sport Clothing

- Instead of wearing three piece suits all day long, men would dress for business in the morning and quickly changed into more comfortable clothing when they returned home.
- What sets 1950s men’s casual clothing apart is the sheer variety of options, the bold splash of colors, and the overwhelming use of new textures and materials.
- Shorts
 - They gained mass market appeal in the 1950s.
 - They were most popular at the “Bermuda” length.
 - They fit like men’s slacks without pleats at the waistband, and hung straight down to an inch or two above the knee cap.
 - They came in plain colors as well as plaid, seersucker, and stripes in cotton, linen, madras, and even flannel. Some had back belts and most were worn with contrasting fabric belts.

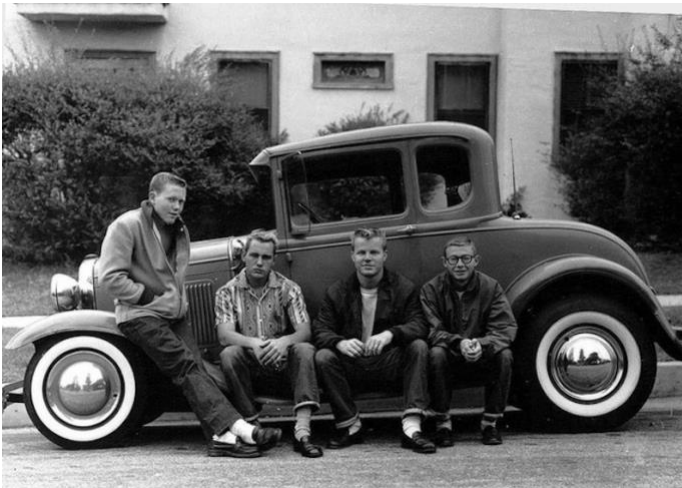


- Always worn with knee high socks in bold patterns and penny loafers or moccasins.
- Blue jeans, chinos, and khakis, grew in popularity and were always cuffed at least 2-4 inches
- Men's casual shirts came in a few varieties: button down, knit shirt, T-shirt, Hawaiian shirt, and shirt jacket.
 - Button down shirt – almost always plaid and could be worn short or long sleeved. (could go the way of “Western” style too)
 - Knit shirt -- resembled a modern-day polo, except the collar was much wider and contrasted with the shirt body. Most were pullover styles with a gathered waistband worn normally tucked into pants
 - T-shirts – made famous by Marlon Brando, round collared, jersey knit t-shirts were primarily worn by kids and teens in plain colors.
 - Hawaiian shirt – Left over from the war era, the classic button-down shirt made of cotton was printed in abstract tropical designs. It could be worn tucked in, but when paired with casual pants and shirts, it was left untucked. (woohoo!)
 - Shirt Jacket – Inspired by Western wear, men would opt for a wide pointed collared, buttoned “shacket” in cooler weather in solids, or plaids.
- Like women in the 1950s, men also worn cardigans, letterman, and pullover sweaters.



Outerwear

- If we were to choose one iconic style of men's 1950s jacket, it would be the bomber jacket. This short waisted jacket with ribbed waistband, cuffs, front zipper, slash pockets, and ribbed collar or classic point collar.
- Additionally, the letterman jacket, with its association with athletic achievement and school pride, became a sought-after fashion item, especially amongst American teens.



Notable 1950s Styles

- Greasers
 - Think of the movie *Grease* and based on early Rock and Roll. This style is now often co-opted by Rockabilly fashion. The look comes from early rock and roll musicians like Buddy Holly, early Elvis Presley and movie stars like James Dean and Marlon Brando.
 - Top: Plain black or white T-shirt
 - Bottom: Tight dark jeans

- Outwear: Leather or bomber jacket
- Accessories: leather belt and/or cowboy hat

- Ivy League

- This was more of the “preppy,” collegiate style. Think of the movie “Dead Poets Society”
- Top: Oxford shirts, cardigans, sweater vests, university knit sweater, and polo shirts
- Bottom: khaki pants and chinos
- Outerwear: tweed/herringbone sport coats and navy blazers
- Shoes: penny loafers and boat shoes



- Beatniks (late 1950s)

- Based on a literary and social movement started in the early 1950s by a group of writers, including Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac, who were dissatisfied with post-war American culture, the beat aesthetic gained popularity in fashion. Movie reference: Audrey Hepburn in *Funny Face* or even nodded to by “The Beret Girl” in *An Extremely Goofy Movie*.
- Tops: black or striped shirts and black turtlenecks
- Bottoms: skinny black jeans
- Accessories: berets and sunglasses
- Shoes: loafers

Neckwear

- The 1950s saw thinner neckties of about 3 1/8 inches.

- The neckties also started getting longer as the trouser waistline lowered.

- The 2-inch skinny knit/crochet tie was worn across college campuses both in solids and wide stripes.

- Slim and longer bowties were still an acceptable choice.

- Clip-on ties and bow ties in all kinds of colors started to emerge in the 1950s.



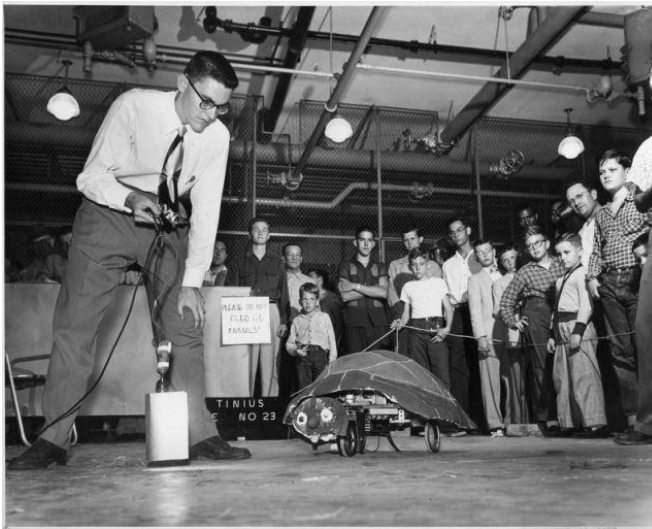
Shoes

- Typical men's shoes: black and white saddle shoes, two tone wingtip oxfords, penny loafers, creepers, Nubuck Oxfords, canvas sneakers (think Converse and/or Keds) and Elvis's blue suede shoes.
- Boots: engineer boots (greaser boots), cowboy boots, wellington, chukka, Chelsea, and classic lace up boots.



Accessories:

- Belts were generally thin (3/4 to 1 inch) and leather with small buckles. Suspenders too remained a functional and stylish choice for securing trousers, favored for their classic appeal and comfort.
- Gentlemen often adorned themselves with various accessories, including cigarette cases, lighters, tie pins, tie bars, watches, rings, key chains, money clips, and, of course, a wide range of cufflinks.
- Eyeglasses took the shape of a thick-rim plastic frame, as inspired by Buddy Holly and others. Browline glasses, in various colors, were also popular with adults.
- Due to all the film stars in Hollywood and the interest in outdoor leisure, sunglasses sales really took off.



- Wrist watches in the 50s were known for their modesty and minimalism. They were smaller than modern wristwatches. And yet, this decade also saw rise to the luxury Swiss brands.
- Hats completed the outfit! The hats were still traditionally fedoras, but the trilby (the shorter brimmed version of the fedora) grew in popularity for formal and casual looks. Other options were flat cap, baseball hat, or even a newsboy cap.
- Jewelry involved signet rings and chain bracelets.

Hair

- As we reached the conclusion of this guide, it won't surprise you to know that hairstyles in the 1950s were varied as well. But here are three of the most iconic looks:
 - Crew cut/Ivy League – This is the clean-cut, neat appearance look that symbolized the post-war return to traditional values. This was the businessman's haircut.

- Pompadour/Quiff – On the other hand, this is the haircut of the “rebel.” These styles feature longer hair on top, styled upwards and back, and used a pomade to hold the look in place.
- Ducktail – Another rock n roll influenced style, this look involved hair slicked back around the sides and brought together at the back of the head to create the rear end of a duck.
- Facial hair was generally kept to a minimum with clean-shaven faces being the preference. However, a thin, neatly trimmed mustache was allowable in some circles. The Beatniks and more artistic members of society grew out goatees and Van Dyke beads.
- Sideburns also started to make a comeback near the end of the decade.



Resources:

- <https://www.centralcasting.com/1950s-fashion-for-men-women/>
- <https://vintagedancer.com/1950s/1950s-mens-fashion/>
- <https://www.gentlemansgazette.com/what-men-wore-1950s/>
- <https://www.fashionbeans.com/article/1950s-mens-fashion/>
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- <https://inktank.fi/cool-black-and-white-pictures-from-the-1950s/>