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Women put 6 inches on waists in 60 years: And the main reason? They don't use as much elbow grease when they do the housework

It's almost enough to make you put down the paper and pick up the Hoover.

Women's waistlines have grown by six inches over the past 60 years – because they don't do as much housework as their forebears, researchers claim.

Without the benefit of modern household appliances, 1950s housewives used to burn up to 1,000 calories a day simply by doing the chores.



Keeping slim: A 1950's housewife burnt off around 1,000 per cleaning session

By comparison, today's women have much more sedentary lifestyles, as many work full-time and spend most of the day sitting behind a desk.

The extra elbow grease needed for cleaning, washing and sweeping in the 1950s meant that the average middle-aged woman had a 28-inch waist. Today, the average measurement is 34 inches.

The research was carried out by Saga, the over-50s group, to mark the Queen's Diamond Jubilee.



Taking it easy: Today's women are more sedentary

It surveyed 8,000 men and women on their waist sizes, calorie intake and lifestyle, then compared the results with the average statistics for adults in 1952, the year of the Queen's accession to the throne.

As well as leading more active lives, women in the 1950s ate slightly less, as rationing was still in place and fast food barely existed.

Typically they consumed only 1,818 calories each day, compared with 2,178 calories now. The recommended allowance is 2,000 calories.

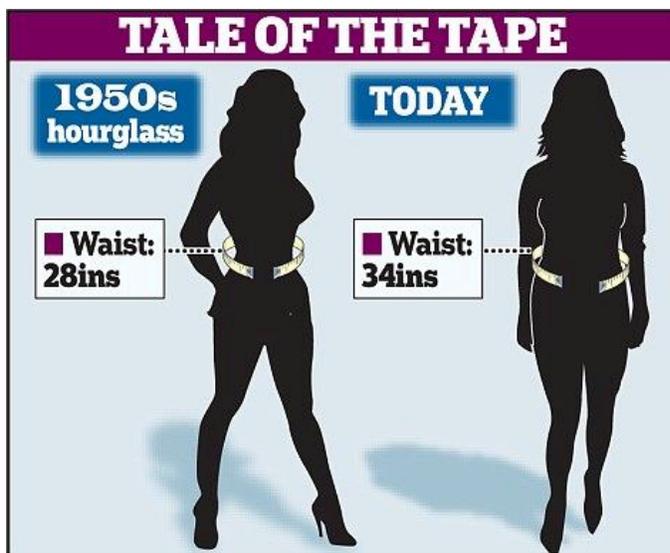
Dr Ros Altmann, Saga's director-general, said improved gadgets had significantly reduced the time and effort required for housework. 'If you think back to the 1950s most women would not even have had a washing machine,' she said.

'They wouldn't have had duvets so the simple task of making a bed would have demanded far more physical activity. Women would have burned a significant number of calories just keeping the house going.' Instead, today's women have to set aside time in their already busy schedules for exercise, she said.

'Nowadays you have to actually go to the gym to take exercise. My mum didn't even have a car, she would have walked everywhere.

Dr Altmann added: 'I think there's some element with the availability of fast food but women in the 1950s would still have eaten chips and puddings. It seems to me that the physical activity demanded by keeping a home was ensuring women were fitter and thinner than they are today.'

Tam Fry, of the National Obesity Forum, said that although obesity affects both sexes, rates tend to be higher among women because of weight gained during pregnancy.



He said many struggle to lose the extra pounds between giving birth becoming pregnant with their second child.



The latest figures show 23.9 per cent of women are obese, compared with 22.1 per cent of men. Saga's survey also showed how the relationship between the generations has changed over the past six decades.

Grown-up children were once expected to subsidise the income of their parents, but today the over-50s are increasingly likely to still be supporting their offspring instead.

Attitudes towards retirement have also changed. In 1952, finishing work was seen as a chance to rest and relax. Men aged 65 had a life expectancy of 12.1 years, while for women it was 15.5 years.

Nowadays, life expectancy for 65-year-olds is 21.7 years for men and 24.2 years for women. It means retirement tends to be seen as an opportunity to change direction – but also that nearly four in ten adults want to, or have to, continue working after retirement.



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