

Fashion in Ancient Egypt

Ancient Egyptian Clothes

- In the hot, dry climate of ancient Egypt people did not need to wear many clothes. In fact, most children went naked until they were in their teens. Most Egyptians wore simple clothes but then added a lot of jewellery to make themselves look good.
- From the earliest times, flax provided linen for clothes for everyone in ancient Egypt. The earliest picture of a loom is on a pottery bowl dated to around 3000 BC and flax was used for thousands of years after this.
- Until the time of the New Kingdom, all the Egyptians wore the same basic clothes. Most of the clothes were made from light-coloured linen. Women wore long dresses down to their ankles, with shoulder straps.



Who Wore What?

Noblewomen's dresses were made of the best cloth with beads sewn onto it.

Men wore either a tunic or kilt-like skirts, a piece of linen wrapped around the waist and tied in a decorative knot. Their clothes were sometimes decorated with pleats or folds.

Wealthy people's clothes were made from fine linen, while ordinary people used a thicker, coarser cloth.



Labourers and servants wore loincloths.



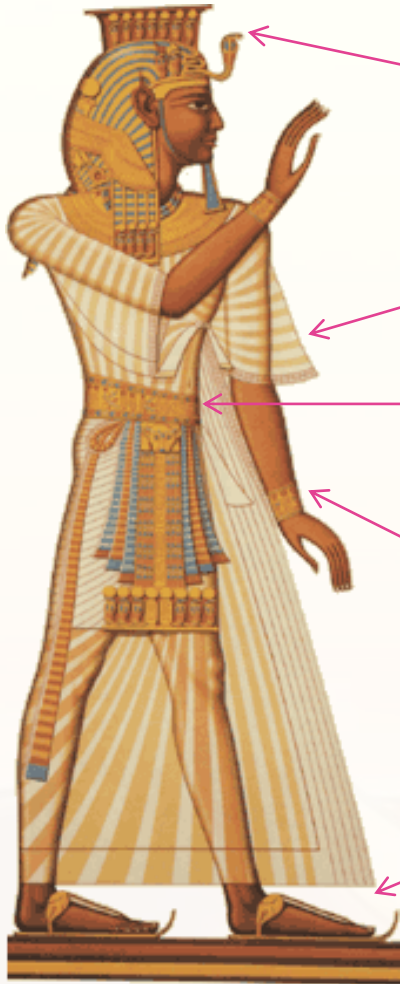
These light clothes made sure that the people of Egypt kept cool in the hot weather.

We know about what the Egyptians wore from writing, wall paintings and sculptures.

Children in Egypt did not wear clothes until they were about 6; after that they wore the same clothes as adults.

Most clothing was made from linen, which could be decorated with beads, embroidery and dyes.





headdress

robes called
kalasiris

belt

jewellery

reed sandals



The New Kingdom

- In the New Kingdom, styles changed.
- Fashionable people wore cloaks made from very thin pleated linen.
- Some men wore a double kilt (one long and one short).
- Women's tunics were decorated with ornaments and fringes.
- There are still only vague ideas about how the Egyptians got pleats into their clothes - perhaps it involved a board with a grooved surface that damp garments would be pressed into. Probably the number of pleats is exaggerated in many statues.
- The Egyptians learned the art of dyeing their clothes in coloured patterns from the Middle East, but the technique was never widespread.

Footwear

Sandals were made from papyrus, grass and other reeds.

Rich people, courtiers, kings and queens wore padded leather ones, made by stitching strips of ox leather together with papyrus twine.

Colourful pictures of sandals were even painted onto the feet of some mummies!

Footwear was a luxury item and most ordinary people walked around barefoot.



Jewellery

- All Egyptians liked to wear jewellery and both men and women wore necklaces, bracelets and earrings.

- You can see the glint of gold everywhere in Egyptian jewellery - mines between the Nile and the Red Sea coast yielded large quantities of this precious metal.

- The gold could be beaten into shape or cast in moulds. Goldsmiths also made patterns using a method called granulation, in which tiny granules of gold were attached to an object by soldering.

- Egyptian jewellers had access to many semi-precious stones from the deserts - the orange red carnelian, the green feldspar, and the mauve amethyst. They also imported stones. From the mines in the Sinai Peninsula came the light blue turquoise and trade routes from Afghanistan brought the rich blue lapis lazuli to Egypt.

- Wealthy people wore jewellery made of gold and precious stones.

- Less wealthy people's jewellery was made from copper and beads.



Hair

- Girls usually wore their hair in pigtails.
- Boys mostly had shaved heads, sometimes with a pleated lock on one side. This long 's' shaped curl was called "the side-lock of youth". Children wore this style until they were around 12 years old when they were considered to be adults.
- Many men shaved their heads too and both men and women often wore wigs.
- Wealthy people wore wigs made from human hair or sheep's wool which was then stuck into place with beeswax. The wigs were kept in special boxes on stands at home. Wigs were often long and elaborate and needed a lot of attention. Egyptians cared for their wigs using a comb made with wood and ivory.



False Beards



- Pharaohs always wore a crown or headdress.
- No one was allowed to see their hair.
- At important events they wore a false beard as a symbol of being King.

Beauty



* Queen Nefertiti statue

- The Egyptians were lovers of beauty and fashion. Many of their personal names are based on the word “nefer”, meaning beautiful, for example, Nefret, Nefertiti, and Nefertari.
- The goddess associated with adornment was Hathor the Golden, who is seen as the ideal of beauty in love poetry of the time.
- Rich men and women spent a lot of time on their looks. They bathed every day and rubbed scented oils on their skin.

Make Up

- In Egypt both men and women wore eye make up.
- A special black eye make up, called kohl, was made from ground-up raw metals mixed with oil. The Egyptians believed it had magical healing powers and could restore bad eyesight and heal eye infections.
- Egyptians also used face rouge for the cheeks and lipstick made from ochre (a red earth), face powder, paint for fingernails and hair dyes.
- Many objects, like mirrors and cosmetic holders, have survived to show how important personal appearance was to the Egyptians.
- “Put myrrh on your head and dress up in beautiful clothes,” says one Egyptian song.

ACTIVITY

Either use and cut out a photo or draw yourself or a figure! Design outfits for your figure using inspiration from the Egyptians. You can use the clothes template or create your own!

