How can hats help prevent skin cancer

Many skin cancers occur on the face, neck and ears. A well designed hat can help shield you from the sun’s harmful ultraviolet (UV) rays. By wearing an appropriate hat, you can reduce the risk of disfiguring skin cancer. You need the most protection at midday, between 10 am to 3 pm, when UV rays are most severe. Your exposure to UV rays increases 20% when reflected off a pool or lake, and you also can get a bad sunburn on cloudy days.

Why should I worry about skin cancer?

One in seven people in the United States gets skin cancer. Of those cases, one in 100 are melanoma, which can be fatal. One severe, blistering sunburn before the age of 18 doubles your risk, which also increases with age.

Skin Cancer is more common if you are:
• fair or light-skinned
• have a family history of certain moles, or
• spend a lot of time outdoors in the sun, whether for work, sport, or leisure.

Are all skin cancers the same?

No, there are three types:
• Basal cell (75% of all skin cancers)
• Squamous cell (20% of all skin cancers)
• Melanoma (5% of skin cancers that cause 75% of all skin cancer deaths)

The steady increase in the incidence of melanoma suggests that we need to make better use of hats, other clothing, and sunscreen lotions to protect skin from the sun. With early identification and treatment, survival rates increase. Ninety-nine percent of basal cell and squamous cell cancers are curable. The five year survival rate for melanoma, if found early is approximately 85%.

Monitor your moles.

Most moles are harmless, but learn your ABCD’s to be alert for melanoma, the most serious skin cancer. Melanoma might be suspected when a mole has:
A - Asymmetry: One half does not match the other.
B - Border irregularity: The outside edges are ragged, notched, or blurred.
C - Color variation: The skin pigment is not uniform, but shades of tan, brown, black or red, white and blue.
D - Diameter greater than 6 millimeters (about 1/4 inch) with any sudden or continuing to increase in size.

Make it a habit to...

• Examine your skin carefully, front and back in a mirror every 6-8 weeks. Take note of any changes in your skin.
• Watch for sores that won’t heal, red patches, and changes in size or color of moles. These may be warning signs of skin cancer.
• Consult your doctor for regular checkups and any time you are in doubt.
• Use sun tan lotion with a sun protection factor (SPF) rating of at least 15.
• Wear a hat and other clothing to shelter yourself from the sun.

Hat styles differ in their ability to shade our face and protect you from the sun. As we better understand the relationship between sun exposure and skin cancer, hat design takes on a new importance.