

How Flip-Flops, Baseball Caps Can Raise Your Skin Cancer Risk

21 May 2009, by Perry Drake

(PhysOrg.com) -- Cheap, convenient and casual, baseball caps and flip-flops have acquired a trendy charm. Those qualities have made them must-wear accessories for teens, outdoor enthusiasts, gardeners or anyone trying to keep cool during the sweltering days of summer.

However, flip-flops and baseball caps could pose a hidden health risk from skin cancer, said Dr. Anthony Peterson, assistant professor of medicine, dermatology, Loyola University Chicago Stritch School of Medicine, Maywood, Ill.

"Most skin cancers occur on the parts of the body that are repeatedly exposed to the sun," said Peterson, who is also director of Loyola's [dermatology](#) division. "The problem with flip-flops and baseball caps is that they leave the tips of the ears and the tops of the feet dangerously exposed to sun damage. The potential for skin cancers in those areas are real, especially on the tips of the ears."

Peterson said that before the popularity of flip-flops and baseball caps, people venturing out on sunny days traditionally wore broad-rimmed hats and sneakers or shoes that afforded a large measure of protection to the tops of their feet and tips of their ears.

"But now those areas of their bodies have very little protection," Peterson said. "Combine that with the fact that most people using sunscreen frequently overlook those parts of their bodies when applying it. From my point of view as a dermatologist, that's not a very good combination."

Skin cancer is the most common type of cancer. It accounts for nearly half of all cancers in the United States, according to the American Cancer Society. Most skin cancers are classified as nonmelanoma, usually occurring in either basal cells or squamous cells. These cells are located at the base of the outer layer of the skin or cover the internal and

external surfaces of the body.

More than 1 million cases of nonmelanoma skin cancer are found in this country each year, according to the Cancer Society. Most of those cases are considered to be sun-related. They develop on sun-exposed areas of the body, like the face, ear, neck, lips, and the backs of the hands. Depending on the type, they can be fast- or slow-growing, but they rarely spread to other parts of the body.

Melanoma is a cancer that begins in the melanocytes -- the cells that produce the skin coloring or pigment known as melanin. Melanin helps protect the deeper layers of the skin from the harmful effects of the sun.

Melanoma is almost always curable when it is detected in its early stages. Although melanoma accounts for only a small percentage of skin cancer, it is far more dangerous than other skin cancers, and it causes the majority of skin cancer deaths.

You can prevent all forms of [skin cancer](#), including melanoma, by avoiding overexposure to ultraviolet (UV) rays.

- * Use a sunscreen with an SPF of at least 15 daily. Wearing sunscreen in the early fall is just as important, too.
- * Wear protective clothing outdoors, including a wide-brimmed hat, a long-sleeved shirt, and pants.
- * Stay out of the sun during the midday hours (10 a.m. to 3 p.m.).
- * Use a higher SPF when at higher elevations.
- * Avoid sunbathing and tanning salons. UV rays from artificial sources such as tanning beds and sunlamps are just as dangerous as those from the

sun.

* Set a good example for your children by always using [sunscreen](#) and wearing protective clothing.

Provided by Loyola University Health System ([news](#) : [web](#))

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