**Challenging you to wear your Hat!**

I was challenged to write an article on hats. Yes, simply about hats. Which can honestly be done in about one paragraph discussing the benefits and need for everyone to wear hats. However, after my latest visit with my dermatologist, better hats are even more important to think about.

I almost always purchase myself a new hat every year. Usually its “summer style” cowboy hat made of non-breakable straw. One to wear while doing outdoor activities. A little more stylish and a break from the baseball cap.

Many people don’t like the cowboy hat style, I personally choose it for the rim. Any hat with a rim that provides sun coverage to your nose, ears, face, cheeks, back of neck and looks good will work. All which are important when purchasing a hat, especially the looking good part.

Have you ever sunburned your “part” in your hair? Or the top of your head? There you go, another reason why you need to wear a hat.

Science says you should wear a hat because:

Wearing a hat protects against aging. The sun causes most of the wrinkles and age spots that develop, as we get older. Sun exposure also causes most of the skin changes associated with aging. Over time, the sun’s ultraviolet (UV) light damages the fibers in the skin called elastin, a condition known as Elastosis. When these fibers breakdown, the skin begins to sag, stretch and lose its ability to go back into place leaving us with a variety of fine and course wrinkles.

Wearing a hat prevents skin cancers. Sun exposure causes pre-cancerous and cancerous skin lesions that can develop into a very serious health issues. These exposed locations on the head, face and hands are prime spots for these lesions to take place and start growing. These lesions can develop into a benign tumor or into a type of skin cancer.

There are three kinds of skin cancers that are common with the skin, basal cell carcinoma, squamous cell carcinoma and melanoma. Basal cell and squamous cell are the less serious types and make up 95% of all skin cancers. Melanoma is much more serious and accounts for 75% of all skin cancer deaths. Melanoma can spread to other organs and it is difficult to control. This is why it’s important to have all parts of your skin checked regularly.

Cumulative sun exposure causes mainly basal cell and squamous cell skin cancer, while episodes of severe sunburns, usually before the age of 18 can cause melanoma later in life. Ultraviolet (UV) radiation from the sun is the number one cause of skin cancer, but UV light from tanning beds is just as harmful. Exposure to sunlight during the winter months puts you at the same risk as exposure during the summertime.

Wearing a hat helps maintain normal skin coloring. Sun exposure also causes freckles, discolored areas of the skin (called mottled pigmentation), sallowness (a yellow discoloration of the skin) and Telangiectasias (the dilation of small blood vessels under the skin). Damaged skin also bruises and tears more easily and will take longer to heal when injured, due to damage done by the sun.

Wearing a hat in the winter helps maintain a more consistent body temperature. Most of the body’s natural heat escapes through the head if it is not covered. Wearing a hat keeps that body heat in the body and will help you stay warm during the cold and windy days here in Estes Park. Just because it is winter, the sun can still be dangerous to your skin so any exposed areas should be covered.

Lastly and more humorously, wearing a hat can totally save the day when it’s a bad hair day.

My advice to you on this “hat topic” day, is to find yourself a baseball cap, cowboy hat, beach hat, visor, bandana or one of each and make it a habit to wear one whenever you are outside for an extended amount of time. Couple this hat with sunscreen and sunglasses and you’ll be in the sun for a real safe, protected and fun time. There. I did it. An entire article about hats.