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## Clothes Make the Doctor

### Patients prefer their physicians in traditional attire, poll finds

**By Kathleen Doheny**  
*HealthDay Reporter*

SATURDAY, Jan. 10 (HealthDayNews) -- Casual Fridays may be embraced by American workers everywhere who love dressing down for their jobs, but when they go to their doctor they want to see white coats and stethoscopes every day of the week.

That's the finding of a recent University of Tennessee survey of 496 patients who visited two different local clinics and were asked what clothing they'd prefer their doctor to don.

Patients surveyed say they want to see their physicians in white coats, complete with a name tag and a visible stethoscope. Least desirable foot attire included sandals, clogs and tennis shoes, adds study author Dr. Amy Keenum, an assistant professor of family medicine at the university. Her report appears in a recent issue of the *Southern Medical Journal*.

"I wasn't surprised by the [preference for] white coats," Keenum says. "But sandals?"

Keenum conducted the survey with the other two female doctors in her practice. She admits she is no fan of high heels. "We were kind of hoping they'd like clogs," says Keenum, who prefers her pair of English walking shoes for comfort during her workday, which often involves 12 hours of seeing patients and being on her feet.

Doctors' attire isn't just an appearance issue, according to Keenum and others who have studied the topic. If patients are comfortable with a doctor's image -- and much of that is conveyed by what he or she wears -- it can help patient-doctor communication and, theoretically, that can improve the outcome

of the treatment.

The findings from the current study do differ a bit from similar ones conducted two decades ago, Keenum says. Back then, patients preferred white coats and shirts and ties for male doctors and dresses for female doctors. In her survey, pants were deemed desirable for women doctors.

Ponytails on male doctors got a thumbs-down, as did perfume on women doctors.

Patients younger than 40 were less likely to prefer traditional attire on their doctors than those over age 40, Keenum found.

The study results make sense to Cheryl Wadlington, creative director of Evoluer Image Consultants in Philadelphia.

"One of the psychological factors of fashion or style or image is Americans are not quick to change," she says. When they think of a doctor, the image is one of a professional, perhaps the "Marcus Welby" look. Often, she says, that is the image they want to keep even as they have become more casual in their own workday attire.

Patients do seem to prefer a traditionally dressed physician rather than a casually dressed one, Keenum agrees.

### **More information**

To read more about doctors' attire, visit the [American Medical Association](#). To find a family doctor, check out the [American Academy of Family Physicians](#).

SOURCES: Amy Keenum, D.O., Pharm.D., assistant professor, family medicine, University of Tennessee, Knoxville; Cheryl Wadlington, creative director, Evoluer Image Consultants, Philadelphia; December 2003 *Southern Medical Journal*

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