

Steps you can take to get used to wearing a mask

Some people have a difficult time wearing a facemask at first, especially those with breathing issues already. You may feel like they look foolish or be anxious about having a hard time adjusting to breathing through the mask. Below are some suggestions we recommend to help you get used to wearing the latest COVID-19 fashion.

Think positive

It's true that breathing through a mask will feel different. See if you can begin with a "I'm going to make this work" mind-set vs. thinking "I'm never going to be able to wear this."

Desensitise yourself

Practice makes perfect, even when it comes to reducing mask-wearing anxiety. Try wearing your mask at home for short periods, taking it off when your anxiety begins to rev up. Even if at first you are only able to wear your mask briefly, you will find longer periods more tolerable over time. Until you build up this tolerance, try limiting time spent wearing your mask outside your home. For example, complete your errands in two shorter spurts rather than one long trip.

Practice at home. Don't jump into the deep end. First, ease into wearing your mask at home while watching your favourite TV show. Then try taking it for a walk around the house, perhaps preparing for dinner. Level up slowly and be kind to yourself as your body adjusts to wearing the facemask, before you show up at a shop where your anxiety might already be high due to fear of exposure.

Anxiety is not uncommon in those wearing a mask for the first time. Face mask anxiety can be worse in people with a history of an anxiety disorder (especially panic disorder) and claustrophobia.

If you're sitting or standing, place both feet flat on the ground. Whatever position you're in, place your feet roughly hip-width apart.

- Let your breath flow as deep down into your belly as is comfortable, without forcing it.
- Try breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth.
- Breathe in gently and regularly. Some people find it helpful to count steadily from 1 to 5. You may not be able to reach 5 at first.
- Then, without pausing or holding your breath, let it flow out gently, counting from 1 to 5 again, if you find this helpful.
- Keep doing this for three to five minutes.

Practice mindfulness

Continually work on bringing yourself back to the present. When we become anxious, it is often because our minds have drifted into the future. In doing so, we start to think about scary possibilities (for example, “what if my breath becomes shallow and I have a panic attack?” or “what will people think of me if I have to leave because my mask is so uncomfortable?”).

Notice when you have drifted into the future or past and bring yourself back to the present. Grounding techniques can be helpful. For example, try looking around the room for a certain colour, noticing smells around you, or focusing on the physical sensations in your body.