

Managing Anxiety While Wearing a Mask

To stop the spread of COVID-19, we've been encouraged to practice social distancing, increase hand washing, and wear a mask in public or at work. For some people, wearing a mask or covering our face may cause difficult feelings. It's not uncommon to experience anxiety, claustrophobia, and fear.

Why Do I Feel This Way?

There likely is a combination of factors that cause challenging emotional reactions. Some people feel wearing a mask increases their feelings of vulnerability, uncertainty and fear about COVID-19. Masks can be a physical reminder of the potential for exposure to a virus that experts still do not know a lot about.

Some people feel uneasy or unable to relax. It also can be uncomfortable to lose communication cues with others at work, with facial expressions altered by a mask.

Mask-wearing may increase or cause anxiety for people, who experience feelings of dizziness, rapid heart rate, difficulty breathing, or feeling trapped. The physiological reactions experienced can cause panic, chest tightness, or sweating.

It is very important to understand your reaction in these situations, so you can learn and practice effective coping skills. You are not alone in your experience, and there are things you can do to help yourself.

Coping Mechanisms

- **Practice Mindfulness;** Pay attention to what is happening in the present moment.
- **Engage Relaxation Techniques;** Prior to starting work or wearing your mask, do a short breathing exercise or meditation. Breathe through your nose and try to expand your belly out with each inhale, and slowly exhale.
- **Name Your Emotions:** It's okay to identify you are feeling anxious or trapped, and that it can be a normal response to an unusual situation.

- **Regulate Your Breathing;** Try to take slow deep breaths in through your nose and out through your mouth.
- **Repeat a Mantra:** A word, phrase or sound that is helpful to focus on, such as "I am safe in this moment". This can help slow your physical responses and racing thoughts.
- **Regularly Take Breaks:** Get fresh air and the opportunity to remove your mask.
- **Wear Loose Fitting Clothing;** Keep your body as cool as possible to help with feelings of overheating.
- **Challenge Negative Thoughts;** Rather than focus on what is difficult for you about wearing a mask, focus on how it is helping keep you and others safe.

If You Need Help

- **Talk with friends and family** about your feelings. You may find many people have experienced something similar and can be supportive.
- **Contact your EAP.** Confidential help is available 24/7, you have access to counselors who can work with you to process emotions and identify healthy coping skills.

For more tips, log onto the member website at cascadecenters.com

For assistance

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