Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

How To Manage Anxiety Around Mask Wearing



Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, masks or face coverings—whether mandated or recommended—are becoming more common place in public spaces in an effort to slow the community spread of the virus. However, some people feel anxious about wearing a mask or experience anxiety when donning a mask.

Common mask anxieties

Is my mask working? As long as you're wearing your mask correctly, it will serve its intended purpose of helping to prevent the spread of COVID-19. If you're not sure if your mask is on correctly, you can watch the World Health Organization's video "**How to Wear a Fabric Mask**", or visit Health Canada's guide on **Appropriate use of non-medical mask or face covering**.

What if I feel like I can't breathe? Some people feel anxious or uneasy when wearing a mask. In some cases, it may exacerbate their anxiousness because it mimics the physical sensations of their anxiety such as shortness of breath. However, most people report that after time, mask wearing feels normal and natural.

What if I'm wearing a mask, but other people aren't? If you're in close quarters, such as on public transit or inside a shop where it is difficult to avoid other people, you can always leave the space you're in. It's best to focus on what you can control, such as your wearing a mask, rather than what you can't control (such as other people's mask use).

How to manage anxieties about mask wearing

Accept that some things are beyond your control. The COVID-19 pandemic has meant that sometimes circumstances, and not our choices, are the driving forces in our lives. Try to focus on the things you can control, and let go of those you can't.

Stay informed. Keeping up-to-date with recommendations made by the government and health organizations for best practices on how to stay safe will help turn down the "volume" on your anxious thoughts. You'll be able to safely say, "There are things beyond my control, but right now I am doing everything I can to stay safe."

Remind yourself that by wearing a mask, you are keeping yourself (and those around you) safer. Knowing that your choice to wear a mask is what's in the best interest for yourself and those

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around you will make the decision to wear one easier, in spite of any anxiety you might be feeling about it.

If you're concerned that wearing a mask will mimic symptoms of your anxiety, try to think of ways to limit or ease those worries. For example, try not to do activates that require you to wear a mask for too long, and take breaks outside in the open air if you can. If the feeling of having something around your face or jaw is upsetting, try different styles of masks such as cloth ties that do not have elastic, or neck gaiters that drape down to your neck instead of tying behind your head.

Be aware of signs that you might be becoming anxious—before it happens. If the thought of putting on a mask is causing your muscles to tense up or you're thinking intrusive or negative thoughts, take action to course-correct an anxious episode. Try to relax through meditation, exercise, a breathing exercise, counting to 10, calling a friend, or doing something else to break the cycle.

If you're still feeling anxious, your assistance program is here to help. Caring counsellors can help give you the support you need.