



Face Mask Comfort Advice

Keeping the OCU Community Safe

Reducing the Stress of Masks

FEELING STRESS

It is natural to feel stressed about wearing a face mask during these times of high uncertainty. A feeling of danger can stem from experiencing new or different feelings. Our bodies are on alert to lessen our exposure to risk, but when our heart rates rise, our brains may interpret the situation as more dangerous than it is. We may be more aware than normal of what our bodies are feeling, such as when we are uncomfortably warm under personal protective equipment. That extra awareness may cause us to grow concerned about such things as getting enough air.

Face masks protect ourselves and others in times of high rates of infection, such as with COVID-19, but we can take steps to be more comfortable and breathe easier while wearing them.

TRIAL RUN

If you feel nervous about wearing a mask, hold it up to your face to see how it feels against your skin, hold it in front of your mouth to see what it feels like to breathe through it, and finally, try wearing it.

TRAIN FOR COMFORT

A simple but effective tool to grow more comfortable wearing masks is called “exposure and desensitization” to reduce negative feelings, fear, and stress. The more practice we give our brain and body wearing a mask, the easier it becomes.

Practice up to 1 hour a day, and monitor your anxiety level on a scale from 1 (low) to 10 (high). When you can do the following exercises for 45 minutes a day and your anxiety is 4/10 or lower for 3 days in a row, you’re ready to move to the next step.

- 1 Breathe slowly. Spend 30 minutes breathing in to the count of 4, holding your breath for 2 seconds, and breathing out to a count of 6 with shoulders soft and sagging and legs loose and relaxed. Do this once a day for a week while holding a mask in your lap. You may try thinking of the word “calm” or your own calming phrase while you breathe out.
- 2 Follow the same diaphragmatic circle breathing while holding a mask up to your face.
- 3 Follow the same breathing while wearing the mask with straps over your ears.
- 4 Follow the same breathing while walking around your home and wearing the mask.
- 5 Practice wearing your mask while talking to people.
- 6 Wear a mask outside of your home for walks, trips to the store, and more.

Other ways to practice mask-wearing:

- Wear a mask or similar face covering where you don’t have to.
- Put on a mask and sit in a chair, like you would at work.
- Practice wearing a mask when you feel stressed, and wait for your stress to decline.

REMIND YOURSELF YOU’RE OK

When you are stressed while wearing personal protective equipment, including masks, try reminding yourself of these things:

- I will focus on the task at hand.
- I will do my best to learn, teach, and serve at OCU.
- The mask is here to protect me.

Sources: *UChicago Medicine, NYU Langone Health, Emory University School of Medicine, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs*

Increasing the Comfort of Masks

Denizens of the internet offer these tips:

- Chew gum or use sugar-free menthol cough drops so you're smelling good breath all day, or spray your mask with a great-smelling antibacterial laundry sanitizer.
- If you wear glasses, use a mask with a wire at the top (or sew in a wire yourself) to shape it to the contours of your face. You can also place tissue on the bridge of your nose under your glasses to absorb moisture and prevent fogging. Some doctors found that washing their glasses with soapy water without rinsing created a film that reduced fogging.
- For ear relief, hook each ear loop to a paper clip to form a loop around your head.
- Keep your mask clean to help avoid breakouts, and take a break from heavy makeup under your mask.
- Bring a backup mask if it's a hot day.

Sources: *NBC Today*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Boston Globe*

How to Safely Wear a Mask

The World Health Organization recommends:

- Before putting on a mask, clean your hands with alcohol-based hand sanitizer or soap and water.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a mask, and make sure there are no gaps between your face and the mask.
- Avoid touching the mask while using it; if you touch it, clean your hands with hand sanitizer or soap and water.
- Replace the mask with a new one as soon as it is damp, and do not re-use single-use masks.
- Remove your mask from behind without touching the front of the mask. Discard immediately in a closed bin; clean hands with alcohol-based hand sanitizer or soap and water.
- Wash fabric masks, preferably with soap and hot water, after each day of use. Do not reuse dirty or damaged masks.
- Masks alone don't prevent the spread of COVID-19. Keep a distance of 6 feet from others and wash your hands frequently.

Sources: *World Health Organization*, *Los Angeles Times*