April 8, 2020

How NOT to Wear a Mask

Wearing a face mask takes some getting used to. To get the most benefit, you need to avoid these common mistakes.

By Tara Parker-Pope

Almost overnight, masks in a variety of colors, styles and materials have appeared on the faces of people around us. While it's good news that many people are doing their part to slow the spread of coronavirus, the bad news is that many people are wearing their masks wrong.

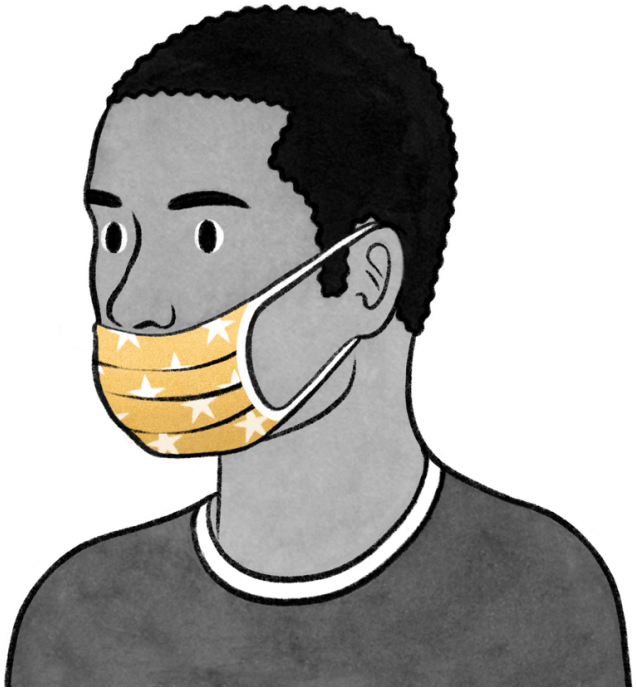
"Wearing a mask takes some getting used to, for sure," said Dr. Scott Segal, chairman of anesthesiology at Wake Forest Baptist Health. "You are probably wearing it exactly right if it's a little stuffy."

One of the biggest mistakes people make is that they fidget with their masks, and pull them under their noses or completely off their faces to rest under their chins.

"You should absolutely not be pulling up and putting down your mask while you're out," said Shan Soe-Lin, a lecturer at the Yale Jackson Institute for Global Affairs. "If you're going to go to the trouble of using a mask, leave it on."

Here are the dos and don'ts of wearing a mask.

DON'T: Wear the mask below your nose.



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DON’T: Leave your chin exposed.

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DON’T: Wear your mask loosely with gaps on the sides.

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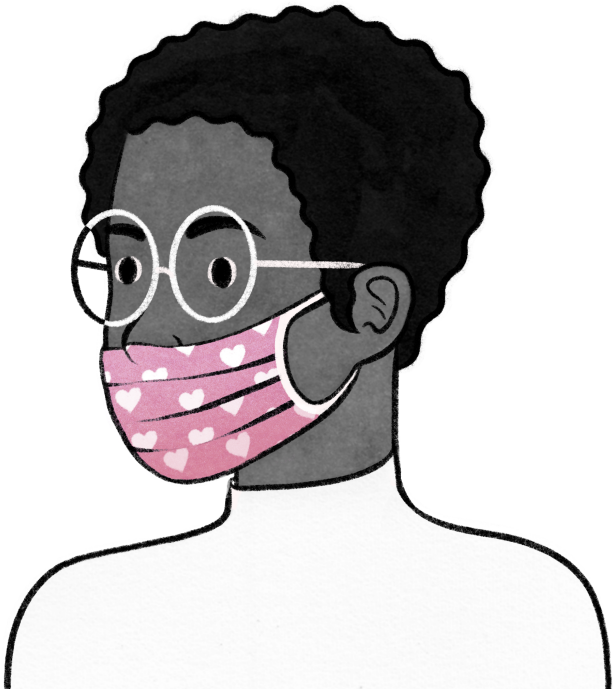
DON’T: Wear your mask so it covers just the tip of your nose.



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DON’T: Push your mask under your chin to rest on your neck.

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DO: Wear your mask so it comes all the way up, close to the bridge of your nose, and all the way down under your chin. Do your best to tighten the loops or ties so it's snug around your face, without gaps.

And once you've figured out the correct position for wearing your mask, follow these tips to stay safe:

- Always wash your hands before and after wearing a mask.
- Use the ties or loops to put your mask on and pull it off.
- Don't touch the front of the mask when you take it off.
- For apartment dwellers, put the mask on and remove it while *inside your home*. Elevators and stairwells can be high-contamination areas.
- Wash and dry your cloth mask daily and keep it in a clean, dry place.

- Don’t have a false sense of security.

Masks offer limited protection, and work better when combined with hand washing and social distancing. “It’s not that one excludes the other,” said Dr. Siddhartha Mukherjee, assistant professor of medicine at Columbia University. “They compound the effects of the other.”

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ELENI KALORKOTI

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