

# Mastering the Mask

## Essential employees offer tips to office workers for wearing masks all day.

As some organizations begin welcoming employees back to the office in waves, people want to return so they can collaborate, meet and socialize with colleagues. But people also acknowledge that, after months of working from home, they are anxious and some of that angst comes from wondering what it will be like to wear a mask all day. Will masks get in the way of connecting with our coworkers and friends? Will it feel uncomfortable or make it hard to talk normally? Essential employees have already been wearing masks for months — they say it might feel weird at first but it quickly becomes normal and they've figured out a few tricks to make sure they're comfortable and effective.

360 spoke to a barista, cleaning company manager and a health and safety engineer who has spent most of the last four months in a manufacturing plant. They all agree a little preparation, persistence and patience go a long way. Here's their five key tips:

### Shop Around

Just like comfortable shoes, you're going to want to try a few masks on to figure out which is right for you. Both our barista and our cleaning manager suggested choosing a lightweight material that feels more like a t-shirt — soft and breathable. And they all say it's really important to test how the mask is secured.

Our barista said the ones that tie around the head tend to slip, but everyone will have their own preference. The engineer described himself as having a big head. He said masks with elastic behind his ears pulled and left impressions on his face, so he prefers face coverings that wrap all the way around his neck and face. An added bonus — he can turn it around when he wants a "fresh" feel and can easily toss it in with his laundry. He says if you don't do laundry that often, disposable may be the way to go. You can even find headbands with buttons people have made that allow you to attach a mask without the uncomfortable pull.

Also, be sure to review your company and CDC's guidelines on effective face coverings.

### Be Prepared

Don't run a 5K without jogging a few laps around the block first. Our experts suggest taking your mask for a dry-run before wearing it all day. You might be comfortable for an hour or two while running errands, but that's not the same as wearing it constantly. Test drive your mask by wearing it around the house to get used to it.

Another idea, if possible, is to start off by working half days in the office. Nothing can replicate the exact conditions and behaviors you experience in the workplace. You'll want to get used to how the mask fits while you talk, work and walk around your space.

## Get Personal(ity)

The good news is that everywhere you turn, you can find masks these days. And depending on your needs, you can find one that is functional for you. If you have glasses and your mask fogs up, try to position the mask just underneath the lower edge of your frames. Another easy trick is to put a piece of scotch tape on the mask over the nose area or try an anti-fog spray. Simple, but effective.

And don't forget to have a little fun. If it's appropriate in your office, use your mask to show some personality. Masks with puppies, palm trees and starry skies share a little bit about who you are with your colleagues.

## Take A Break

Build more breaks into your day. Every couple of hours, you'll want to find a place outside or away from people where you can safely remove your mask and take a few deep breaths. Coffee, tea and lunch breaks help create natural moments during the day to take a breather. When you can, clean your face where the mask covers it and apply face lotion to prevent rashes and breakouts.

## Give It Time

If day one feels like a challenge, hang in there. All of our experts say it gets easier after the first week or two. Your body will adjust to the change and wearing a mask will become second nature. Remember, you're doing this to benefit your community. Changes in behavior always take time to sink in.

Finally, don't feel bad asking people to pull their masks up if they slip or are wearing them incorrectly. Wearing masks, physical distancing and hand washing are the three things that will mitigate the COVID-19 epidemic, so says new research from [PLOS Medicine](#). Plus, the results of a [recent experiment](#) on hamsters shows COVID-19 transmission is significantly reduced by wearing a mask. And our experts say people tend to take suggestions well because most people are trying to do what's in everyone's best interest.

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Steelcase employees are back in the workplace to collaborate, connect and get work done. (Grand Rapids, Steelcase LINC, July 2020)

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