

As of August 20, 2021, New Mexico requires that masks be worn indoors due to the Covid-19 virus.

## Face coverings and Exercising, Do's and Don't

The following is condensed from an American Council on Exercise article  
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### Is it Safe to Exercise with a Face Covering?

Most people can perform their regular workouts while wearing a face covering, which will provide protection from virus spread for everyone (Capritto, 2020).

- Monitor how you feel during the workout; take particular notice if they feel dizzy, lightheaded, or short of breath (Capritto, 2020).
  - If so, slow down/reduce exercise intensity and or stop exercising until these symptoms go away.
  - If you continue to have shortness of breath, remove the covering to allow for better air flow into the lungs.
    - Remember dizziness, lightheadedness, shortness of breath during exercise may also reflect a number of health conditions including the following: overexertion (particularly if a person hasn't worked out for some time or at his or her usual intensity levels, due to stay-at-home rules), dehydration, low blood pressure, low blood glucose, heart arrhythmia (sometimes exercise triggers an irregular heart rhythm) or lack of oxygen.
- Individuals with a pre-existing respiratory or cardiovascular condition are encouraged to take caution when exercising with a face mask (Capritto, 2020).
  - Specifically, those clients who have chronic obstructive pulmonary disorder, asthma, chronic bronchitis, pulmonary fibrosis and any other lung conditions should consult (i.e., via telemedicine) with a medical professional for personal instructions on exercising with a face mask (Capritto, 2020).

### How Hard Should You Exercise While Wearing a Face Covering?

Wearing a covering over the nose and mouth while exercising is likely to reduce the flow of oxygen into a person's lungs (Capritto, 2020). To minimize early symptoms of fatigue during exercise with a face mask, exercise participants should **not push themselves as hard as usual**.

- Some workouts, such as high-intensity interval training (HIIT), which have been shown to be very demanding on the cardiorespiratory system, may feel a little more difficult. This could be a direct result of reduced amounts of oxygen reaching the vigorously exercising muscles. Less oxygen to exercising skeletal muscle reduces the ATP production to provide the needed energy to maintain the exercise intensity and duration (Hargreaves, 2016). Therefore, a slightly lowered oxygen level reaching the muscle is a central contributing factor to fatigue (Hargreaves, 2016).
- Some exercisers who wear face masks may notice they are not able to complete an otherwise "normal" workout, or they feel more fatigued than usual during and after the workout.
- Use a **rating of perceived exertion (RPE)** in combination with heart rate to monitor exercise intensity. Allow your cardiorespiratory system time to gradually adapt to the slight restriction of air flow (from the face mask).
  - Fitness adaptations to changes in overload during workout programs usually take weeks to occur. Face mask wearers may take several workouts before they are fully training at their regular exercise intensities.

## What Type of Face Covering Should a Be Worn to Exercise?

The purpose of the face mask is to help block respiratory droplets from being sprayed into the air when a person coughs, sneezes, breathes or talks (Sweeney 2020). For repeated use, cloth masks are a very good option during exercise. It is best if the cloth mask has multiple layers of fabric (Sweeney, 2020).

- Masks made of a scarf, bandana or T-shirt are not a great option (Sweeney, 2020), as they usually do not fit the face as well as a cloth mask. A neck gaiter (also called a buff) is a flexible tube fabric worn to keep the neck and face warm in cold weather.
- Neck gaiters are not a good option for exercise enthusiasts because they are designed to keep the face and neck warm, and during exercise it is important to dissipate heat from the body (to cool it off).
- Also, avoid using masks that have plastic valves in the front, as these only filter air that a person breathes in and does not block the air breathed out (Sweeney, 2020).

## Tips on Proper Wear of a Face Covering during Exercise

(adapted from Boone, 2020; CDC, 2020; Sweeney, 2020)

- Make sure your mask is big enough to cover your nose and face for proper protection.
- The mask should feel comfortable and snug around your cheeks and nose. Try not to fidget with the mask while you are working out.
- If the mask restricts your breathing prior to exercise, it will not be good to wear during exercise.
- Wash your hands PRIOR to putting on your mask. Soap and water are fine or use an alcohol-based hand rub.
- Make sure you do not touch your eyes, nose or mouth when removing your mask. Wash your hands AFTER taking off your mask.
- It is best to remove your mask by the ear loops because the front of the mask is where germs will collect.
- A great advantage of a cloth mask is that it can be washed. Exercise enthusiasts who exercise regularly are encouraged to have a few masks so there is a clean, dry mask ready for each workout. Any laundry detergent will be fine for washing cloth face masks.
- When you talk, keep your mask over your nose and mouth. Do not pull it down as this defeats the purpose of blocking respiratory droplets from being released in the air.
- If you tend to sweat a lot when you workout (indoors or outdoors), perhaps bring a second mask with you and replace when it becomes damp. It is best to replace a damp mask (from workout sweat or outdoor humidity).
- For people who wear glasses, sometimes they fog up if too much air is released near the nose of the face mask. Readjust the mask to be snug over the nose. Furthermore, it has been shown that washing glasses with soapy water, without rinsing, and letting them dry prior to wearing a face mask reduces fogging. Alas, folding a tissue and placing underneath your glasses may absorb any escaping moisture from your breath.
- With children, find a cloth mask that fits a child's face, comfortable but snug, and follow all of the same safety instructions above. Do not put masks on young children under the age of two.
- The outside of the mask may become contaminated, so do not touch it and instead use correct safety measures when removing it, to avoid negatively impacting the positive health effects of the mask.