

How to Communicate Better When Wearing a Face Mask

Wearing a face mask in public spaces is one new behavior the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic has influenced — and even required — many individuals to adopt.

Face masks, when worn properly (i.e. over the nose, mouth and chin), continue to help reduce the spread of COVID-19 in our communities.

But they can also reduce our ability to communicate effectively with others by muffling our words or covering facial cues. These factors, in addition to social distancing, make wearing face masks particularly challenging for some individuals.

To the right are some tips you can use to improve your communication with others when wearing face masks.



SPEAK SLOWLY AND CLEARLY. Carefully emphasize the beginnings and end of words. This includes the consonant sounds people with hearing loss typically miss most frequently and are the sounds most impacted by masks.



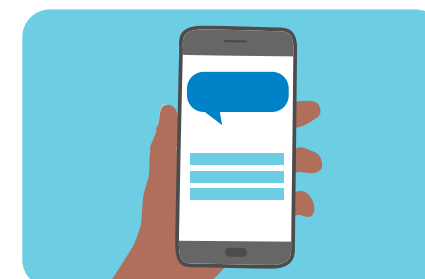
FACE EACH OTHER. Engage in eye contact with the individual(s) to whom you are speaking. Notice any subtle but important visual cues like body language.



CLARIFY UNDERSTANDING. Particularly when sharing important information, ask the other person to say what they heard. Repeat or rephrase as necessary.



WEAR THE RIGHT MASK. Consider wearing a mask with a transparent window to make lip reading and facial cues more visible. Avoid masks with plastic inserts.



USE TECHNOLOGY. Try a speech-to-text app. As another person is speaking, read along to make sure you don't miss anything.



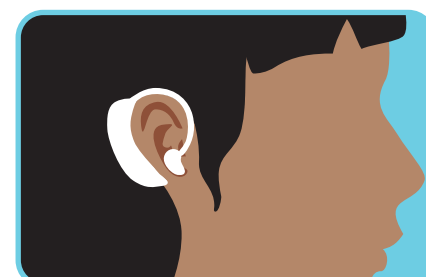
HOST A VIRTUAL EVENT INSTEAD. Using a computer or mobile device to participate in a virtual event can help improve communication because you can control the volume and read others' lips on the screen.



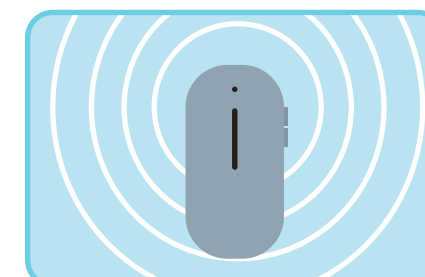
PRINT AND POST SIGNS AND FLYERS. Particularly in professional settings, use signage to supplement frequently shared directions, instructions or questions. Point to signage while speaking the same information.



HAVE YOUR HEARING CHECKED. Visit an audiologist to make sure that changes to your hearing aren't contributing to your difficulty hearing with masks.



TWEAK YOUR HEARING DEVICE. Ask your audiologist to create a "mask" program that adjusts the volume for hearing mid- to high-level pitches. These sounds are most difficult to hear through a mask.



USE A MICROPHONE. If your hearing device has a remote microphone, set it closer to the individuals with whom you are speaking. Disinfect the microphone with a wipe after use. You may use a smartphone's microphone and earbuds to assist as well.

Need a hearing test? Contact Cleveland Clinic Audiology at 216.444.8500 to schedule an appointment.