

Overcoming the Mask— Tips for communicating through COVID-19

It can be challenging to communicate through masks, 6-feet of social distance, physical barriers and other factors due to COVID-19 that have changed daily life.

For people with hearing loss, this is an especially challenging time. In a telling sign of increased hearing difficulty, usage of online hearing tests increased 500% since the pandemic began.

“With COVID-19 and masks, everyday tasks are a source of frustration, such as asking a question at the grocery store deli or talking to someone from behind a customer service desk,” said Bill Schiffmiller, a lifelong hearing aid user and founder and CEO of Akoio, a hearing wellness company.



Look directly at the person you’re speaking to and speak clearly, helping him or her read some of your facial expressions.

“It’s a triple threat because masks reduce the loudness of the voice, muffle pronunciation and eliminate visuals like facial expressions and lip reading.”

Data shows people who can’t hear others begin to stay away from other people, and social isolation can lead to anxiety and depression. People who have trouble hearing also tend to have higher hospitalization rates and longer hospital stays, according to research published in “JAMA Otolaryngology.”

Among those 55 and older who have hearing loss, 58% don’t use hearing aids.

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4 Tips for a Productive 2021

This year has taught many workers a thing or two about being productive when offices and homes blend into one. As the calendar turns to 2021, consider these key products and processes to stay productive next year.

Find a system (and stick to it): Creating an organizing system is an easy way to ensure your at-home workspace is ready for optimal productivity. Designate space to house all your work items – a drawer, cabinet or box – and keep work items organized by type (pens, papers, computer gear, etc.) At the end of each day, transitioning to “offline hours” can be easier when you have a place to stow your work items.

Start your day clean: Studies have shown cleanliness has a direct impact on productivity. Yet, many people struggle to find the time and energy to clean, especially at the end of a busy day at home. An option like The DEEBOT T8 from Ecovacs provides a hands-free cleaning experience, complete with the time-saving benefits of an all-in-one robot vacuum and floor mop, along with TrueDetect technology to avoid tangling in small objects. Easily controlled via an app, just set it to clean before bed and



wake up to a tidy workspace.

Break up your day: With so many hours at home in front of a computer, workdays can get a little monotonous. Break up the day to make working from home feel as “normal” as possible – shower in the morning, take a walk or drive to coffee then make time for at least two breaks throughout the day. Some people have found success with the Pomodoro Technique, which is breaking your day up into 25-minute chunks of work, with 5-minute rest periods. If you continue to work until you feel like taking a break, odds are you’ll overwork yourself until it’s too late to take the “big break” you had in mind.

Bookend your days with mindfulness: At the beginning and end of each workday, do a 3-5-minute mindfulness meditation. Before signing on to work for the day, allow your mind to fully focus on the day’s tasks at-hand. Signoff by doing another meditation to end the day and let go of any worries or stresses you might have. Incorporating this tactic into your daily routine can help create a natural boundary from work and home while also restoring peace of mind.

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In the past, statistics have shown people waiting up to seven years before getting a hearing aid from the time of diagnosis. However, the communication challenges posed during COVID-19 are driving some to address their hearing sooner than they may have otherwise.

Help Someone Hear You Better

Consider the mask you're wearing.

Clear masks provide a visual difference, helping with lip reading and facial expressions. The plastic in clear masks, however, can muffle sound too much for some. According to audiologist Dr. Shivani Patel, high-frequency hearing loss is common, making female voices difficult to hear. In this situation, research has found standard medical masks tend to transfer sound best. Try different masks to see what works for you.

Minimize background noise. Music, construction, other conversations, heaters and fans can make it challenging to communicate when wearing a mask.

Avoid "cavernous" rooms. An environment with mostly hard surfaces, such as a large meeting room or gymnasium, offers minimal sound dampening and can make hearing comprehension more difficult.

Maintain eye contact. Look directly at the person you're speaking to and speak clearly, helping him or her read some of your facial expressions. When using video conference services, look directly into the camera in a well-lit room and ensure you

have clear picture quality to help with lip reading.

Be patient. Remember the increased challenges people with hearing loss are facing now. If communication becomes too challenging through a mask, have a backup plan such as pen and paper or a smartphone note-taking app.

When You're Having Trouble Hearing

Talk to your friends and family. Tell them what you're experiencing and be clear and

direct in expressing your thoughts and feelings. Ask whether they have noticed your hearing troubles and listen to their feedback.

Describe specific instances and circumstances when your hearing is affected most. Armed with this knowledge, friends and family can help you manage various situations.

Determine a plan of action. Set an appointment to have your hearing checked by an audiologist. If you wear a hearing aid, be sure to carry extra batteries. Notice ways to adjust your environment to reduce background noise.

Make hearing wellness a priority. Data shows hearing is important to a person's mental and physical wellness, and untreated hearing loss can have multiple health consequences.

Find more hearing resources, downloadable guides and an audiologist finder at akoio.com.



TEMPORARY lobby hours:

These hours help facilitate cleaning and disinfecting our lobby.

Monday—Friday:

10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

Closed 12:30 p.m.—2 p.m.

Open 2 p.m.—4:30 p.m.

Phones service is available

Monday—Friday

10 a.m.—4:30 p.m.



2021 Upcoming Holidays

MLK, Jr. Day—Monday January 18

President's Day—Monday February 15

Memorial Day—Monday May 31



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