

## Covid 19 – Face Masks & Facial Eczema



### **How can I manage my Facial Eczema and combat the effects of wearing a face mask?**

While they're an important tool in our fight to curb COVID-19, face masks won't be friends with everyone's skin.

Masks increase temperature, moisture and friction thus making the skin more susceptible to irritation. There are very few chemicals used in masks so any reaction is most likely just an irritation rather than an allergy. However, some masks include a glue strip along the nose and cheek area which can cause a reaction for some people and the metal wire that allows you to mould a mask to your face may be made out of nickel (a common contact allergen) so some people may consider attaching a fabric layer to the inside of the mask or finding one without wire.

You may notice redness and dryness where the mask touches the skin and unfortunately, if you have pre-existing skin condition like facial eczema, your skin will almost definitely be aggravated by prolonged mask wearing.

Although it's difficult to give prescriptive advice as everyone's skin is different, there are some simple things everyone can do to help prevent mask-induced skin problems.

#### ***Top Management Tips:***

- Cleanse the skin with a gentle face wash suitable for people with eczema and dry the skin completely
- Moisturise before popping on your mask and after taking it off. Avoid applying ointment emollients to the face shortly before you put on a covering, as they might make the face too hot
- Find the best fitting mask you can — not too tight so that it causes deep indentation (which can lead to pressure urticaria or hives), but not too loose so that it slides around your face causing friction
- Take mask breaks where possible. As a guideline, the American Academy of Dermatology recommends a 15-minute break every four hours

- Cotton material on the inside is best as it is more breathable and synthetics are more likely to irritate your skin. If using a cloth mask, ensure it is washed every time you wear it, preferably in hot water with your favourite sensitive skin washing detergent. If it still irritates, change the brand or type of a mask to a softer variety. Put two layers of gauze inside the mask where irritation occurs
- Cloth ear loops are less likely to irritate the skin than elastic ones. Also consider coverings that tie around the back of the head. 'Mask headbands' or hats with buttons are another option. With these, the elastic loops around the buttons rather than your ears
- When you take off your mask, wash your face to clear up some of the debris, sweat, and whatever you've accumulated during the day using your soap free cleanser and be sure to use lukewarm, not hot, water as hot water can be more abrasive to the skin and further compromise the skin barrier
- Increase moisturiser use, particularly at night when you might choose to use a greasier variety such as an ointment. If you find your face is really hot and burning, use your favourite moisturiser or your topical steroid cream out of the refrigerator which should help calm it down
- If you do experience a flare, consult your GP or Dermatologist - you may need some extra help. It may also be helpful to obtain an exemption letter you can show explaining that you cannot use a face mask because of your condition.

*The information in this article was obtained from [www.eczema.org](http://www.eczema.org), [www.health.com](http://www.health.com)  
& The Australasian College of Dermatologists*

*It is not the policy of the Eczema Association of Australasia Inc to recommend or endorse any product or treatment. It is part of the role of the Association to provide information on a wide range of products and treatments to keep those involved with eczema as fully informed as possible as to all options available. For medical advice, consult your health professional.*

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