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5 Reasons to Wear a Face Mask Other Than Covid-19

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Reasons why face masks might be here to stay

You know those face masks you've been dutifully wearing when you leave the house? They may be doing more than protecting you against Covid-19.

They may also be a good defense against other respiratory ailments. In fact, face masks (along with social distancing) are likely part of the reason this year's flu season has been so mild. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) documented a jaw-dropping 98 percent decrease in flu activity for the season. So, what else can masks protect us from? Plenty. Face masks protect you and those around you by serving as a barrier between your potentially infected respiratory droplets and theirs.

"It's a reciprocal thing," says LaTasha Perkins, MD, a practicing family physician in Washington, D.C.

Simply put, a mask is a "snot barrier," as Dennis Cunningham, MD, system medical director of infection control and prevention at Henry Ford Health System, recently put it to a group of children.

The level of protection depends on the type of droplets being transmitted (small or large) as well as on the material the mask is made from. But, in general, face masks are effective.



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A 2020 study in *Health Affairs*, for instance, found a 2 percent decline in new Covid-19 cases three weeks after mask mandates were put in place in different states, potentially preventing 200,000 people from getting sick.

But masks block more than bacteria and viruses—they act as a barrier against air pollution, particulate matter, pollen, and more.

Vitamins and supplements to take with food

Fish oil

According to the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health, fish oil might not be all it's cracked up to be in terms of protecting the heart. Neither is the belief that you're better off getting omega-3s from actual fish and other food sources. That said, a pill a day likely won't do harm (other than an unpleasant aftertaste). Also, some doctors still recommend them as a preventive measure. But if you don't eat fish—and fish oil is still part of your daily routine—be sure to take the tablets with a meal. "Take these with food in the morning to avoid any regurgitation or burping of the oil," recommends **Elroy Vojdani**, MD, functional medicine expert and founder of Regenera Medical, in Los Angeles.

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