



Face value

The skin can suffer ample damage at the hands of a face mask, and skin experts suggest how to fix it

NIRTIKA PANDITA

While the face masks are quickly turning into a necessary means of protection due to the spread of COVID-19, they also bring with them a little harm to the skin. Being compressed against the face, the mask tends to clog the pores leaving the skin around the T-zone of the face with rashes. The side effect of wearing tightly placed masks for prolonged periods is device-related pressure ulcers (DRPU) caused by compression.

Plastic aesthetic and reconstructive surgeon Dr Devayani Barve-Venkat explains that a mask, either an N95 worn by healthcare workers or the plain cloth mask, tends to change the skin equilibrium around the face,

nose, mouth, and lips. "It can harm the skin especially if you have acne-prone sensitive skin — all these things can cause humidity and clogged pores leading to breakouts. There can also be friction ulcers which can be developed with prolonged mask-wearing," she says.

Dermatologist Dr Nirupama Parwanda opines that while wearing a face-mask is crucial at the moment to prevent the virus spread, "The prolonged wear can trap the secreted perspiration, mucus, and saliva and can cause perioral dermatitis, causing scaling around the nose and mouth."

Dr Ruby Sachdev, consultant aesthetic physician and regional Head-Dermat at VLCC Bangalore, adds that the damp moist environment inside the

mask, gloves, PPE and the constant use of sanitisers is the perfect breeding ground of bacteria, virus fungus, and plasmids residing on our bodies.

If normalcy is resumed, Dr Venkat believes one will have to wear the mask, either N95 or a cloth mask, for nearly eight to 10 hours a day. In such a scenario, she advises washing the cloth mask on a daily basis as well as keeping a spare mask handy. "The prolonged use will cause breakouts, rashes and irritation on the T-zone and along the borders of the mask. One should change the mask in a few hours — all the more necessary in case of cloth mask — since it will be washed with detergent

that can build up contact dermatitis," the surgeon explains.

The reason for keeping a mask handy, she explains is that since not all will be working in an air-conditioned environment, the constant sweating into the mask may increase one's discomfort. "Though it is not essential, however, is advisable to change after four-five hours," she adds.

Dr Parwanda advises wearing the mask only when in public or at social gatherings and giving the face a breather otherwise. "Make sure to prep your skin before putting on a mask by applying a hypoallergenic moisturiser so as to create a barrier between your skin and the moisture released by the mask," the dermatologist suggests, further advising to ensure the area

around the mouth remains dry throughout the day.

"Changing your mask daily definitely will go a long way as old masks attract bacteria from their surroundings that might irritate your skin," she adds.

Meanwhile, Dr Sachdev proposes stitching hydrocolloid dressing strips onto the mask along the bridge of the nose by cutting into thin strips, as these are most appropriate for non-infected wounds and adhere to moist and dry sites.

"They are an opaque, flexible, wafer that adheres to the intact skin and not to wound, and can be changed every three to five days. They are impermeable to bacteria and waterproof," she notes.

As for the face, the VLCC dermat instructs cleaning the skin thoroughly with a pH balanced foaming cleanser. "Add aloe gel with any of these pure oils — tea tree/ chamomile/geranium/lavender — as they are known for their anti-inflammatory and germicidal properties. About 50ml that is five drops will do wonders," she says.

Dr Venkat further suggests creating a routine before and after wearing a mask to keep the skin happy, adding that one must use minimal makeup as it is oil-based and can aggravate closed pores. "In the morning, use a gentle cleanser that is non-perfume and non-irritant based and apply a simple SPF sunscreen. Follow these steps couple of hours before you have to put your mask on so that it goes nicely into your skin and is absorbed well," she lists.

While she purposes applying a good moisturiser at night to get the balance of the skin right, Dr Sachdev advises a moisturiser with antioxidants and hyaluronic acid before SPF in the morning.

DOS AND DON'TS OF WEARING A MASK:

1. Clean your mask regularly
2. Don't touch your mask too often
3. Make sure it is well fitted
4. If you are in isolation and can safely remove your mask, you should do so and let your skin breathe

APPLE CIDER VINEGAR

It is an alpha hydroxy acid that's slightly acidic so when applied topically might be beneficial for taming frizzy hair due to its antibacterial and antifungal properties. Mix 1/3 cup of organic apple cider vinegar with one quart of warm water. Use the vinegar as per the hair thickness and length. Leave it on for one to three minutes and then rinse with cool water. It is recommended to use once or twice weekly.



DrNature

With summer comes sweat and frizzy hair. Here are a few at home remedies for smooth hair:

COCONUT OIL

It is high in lauric acid, can help add moisture and reduce protein loss. It is advised to be used in small amount either as prewash or post-wash to increase moisture and reduce frizz. Gently massage it through your hair and scalp. Leave on for 15 minutes and then wash. Or you can leave it in your hair overnight as a mask.



AVOCADO

It is packed with vitamins A and E, and moisture that can hydrate your hair and tame frizz. Mash a ripe, medium-sized avocado and mix it with two to four tablespoons of coconut oil until you have a smooth, mask-like consistency. It shouldn't be runny. Apply on the scalp and hair, leave for 20 to 30 minutes, then rinse. Use it one to two times a week.

