

EDGE: GEAR. TECH. FITNESS.

SWEAT SAFELY

IS WEARING A MASK WRECKING YOUR WORKOUT
GAINS? HERE'S WHAT THE SCIENCE SAYS



► BY JUSTINE BANBURY

IF YOU'VE ever worn a mask while working out, you're likely familiar with the feeling: a constant suction with each inhale, drawing in the damp fabric, followed by a quick exhale, a puff of moist air and a creeping anxiety as tasks suddenly feel more strenuous.

"You're breathing through a shield, so it becomes a bit more difficult to move air," says Dr. John Porcari, an exercise physiology and sport science professor at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse.

Wearing a facial covering reduces the risk of spreading COVID-19, but for many, it's seen as a hindrance to exercising and the benefits that come with it. While research on the potential decrease in oxygen levels, which could cause lightheadedness, is

still in the early stages, Porcari says some types of masks are more likely to trap extra carbon dioxide from a person's breath, which could cause slight dizziness or headaches when inhaled. In fact, some studies show that an N95 mask can decrease a person's maximum breathing capacity while exercising by 10% to 12%. The activity and degree of physical exertion will also play a role in the reduction of airflow, Porcari says. Bursts of sprinting on a soccer field might pose a tougher challenge than steadily lifting weights in a gym.

And there's also the psychological aspect of getting accustomed to the discomfort of a mask, which is likely the biggest hurdle for most. "One of the reasons people's heart rates are a little bit higher, or they have difficulty breathing, it's almost an anxiety thing," he says. □

EXPERT TIPS FOR MASKED EXERCISE

CHOOSE PROPER PROTECTION

Ditch the N95 during more rigorous sessions—a breathable cloth mask can help control respiratory stress and keep your heart rate in a normal range.

KICK THE PRESSURE

Instead of focusing on intensity or performance benchmarks (like reps, weight or time) in your workouts, remove the stress and shift to simpler activity goals.

FOLLOW YOUR HEART

Use an activity tracker to monitor your heart rate—readings that are a few beats per minute higher than usual during a typical activity may be a sign to slow down or scale back.