

Masks make talking even tougher for people who stutter

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(HealthDay)—Face masks may be invaluable in the fight against

COVID-19, but they can make it difficult for people who stutter to communicate with others.

About 3 million people in the United States stutter, according to the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA). The use of face [masks](#) in public is likely to continue for months or even longer.

Solid [face masks](#) can lead to misunderstandings because they hide your mouth. Many people who stutter experience long, silent pauses (blocks) in their [speech](#). Often, the only way a listener realizes that someone is having a block is by looking at their face.

If you stutter, the person you're talking to may not realize you're experiencing a block if you're wearing a mask. This could lead that person to talk over you, move on, or misinterpret what may seem like a non-response, according to the association.

This type of situation can be especially serious if you are trying to communicate with [health care providers](#), first responders or police.

To reduce the risk of problems, the ASHA offers the following advice:

- Tell people you stutter. You can say this at the beginning of a conversation or carry a printed card. That way, people know to give you extra time if you need it. It also can help remove some pressure if you're anticipating speech difficulties.
- Wear a clear mask. Practice conversations at home. Check online support groups for suggestions. If you're working with a speech-language pathologist, ask for suggestions about modifying your speech therapy techniques.
- If the roles are reversed and you're talking to someone with a [stutter](#) who's masked up, be patient. Don't try to finish their

thought or speak for them, the speech and hearing experts say.

- If you don't understand what the other person is saying, say so. Be open to other ways of communicating, such as reading a written message.

More information: The U.S. National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders has more on [stuttering](#).

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