

# CORONAVIRUS DISEASE (COVID-19) MASKLESS ANXIETY

## HOW TO EASE YOURSELF INTO MASKLESSNESS

You don't have to suddenly whip off your mask and step bare faced into a crowd. Instead, take baby steps. Experiment with or ease yourself into taking it off in places where there aren't many people.

Start by visiting an uncrowded public place, perhaps at a low-trafficked time of day. Maybe you head to the grocery store on a Friday evening or catch a weekday matinee in a mostly empty movie theater. Whatever you decide, bring a mask with you, even if you're going to try not to wear it. Keep it in your pocket-you can practice taking it off if you feel safe and socially distanced. But if you start to feel like there are too many people around, just put it back on.

### Get help if you need it!

It's normal to expect some nervousness and anxiety as social distancing and masking guidelines change. If you're not in a vulnerable population (i.e., immunosuppressed) and have been vaccinated, it's important to try to return to some semblance of normalcy.

In the U.S., we're at a point in the pandemic where people without special vulnerabilities should be able to resume most normal activity.

Signs that you're having trouble include:

- Anxiety that persists beyond 15 minutes of being in a public place.
- Continued feelings of fear and nervousness around unmasking and/or being around others.
- Ongoing avoidance of public places, long after you've been fully vaccinated.

It's normal to feel some nervousness, but if that nervousness doesn't lessen, it may be time to seek help for an anxiety disorder. A mental health professional can work with you on your discomfort and help prepare you to safely reclaim some of your pre-pandemic life. If you feel like you would benefit from some added support right now, contact your employer's employee assistance program and/or primary care doctor.

