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| By [Victoria Jaggard](https://email.nationalgeographic.com/T/v40000017353cd3787be45426e96638918/b64b59e440544c500000021ef3a0bcc8/b64b59e4-4054-4c50-b35d-3198f1f18373?__dU__=v0G4RBKTXg2GtTHJDsy7ii3waBSrIwMXGZJ7x_OARFKFQAIe3mwx22JG_r9Sy1LWLGyMVrrFIdudbYjwKGAKz6iTAgyV5XAM3SbSN-FzJU9XXpFWtSFRxbGw4nHcgLdnvWYAVcbDlQyQtE1-NmUBscmA==&__F__=v0fUYvjHMDjRPMSh3tviDHXIoXcPxvDgUUCCPvXMWoX_0JoZLAZABQF30xF0sKPois3VqfW5bf1WlfvPhqF6LHwDkXhCqC1YIM0pLbSA6BoUG7mzzfAg1TZUMmVok9pwEPAR0VzoPJ02eU0wMX9ISi9L7G6ZU85u0Nzx7GmixCOOIsBKQ6uAmN89QDn_m9T71z7M1owyeQi9b-GpJ69ozpfAkCqiiQZFyWCjaVnlXU_sCd_Vkn8dLrVBr35_vIdhMwvsB7UR8mwxwblqa4OJQdh1SHMgUXFDmFuQD2bJxigFtnpFY3jo9saNoJO68e4X0lpxS12wI58ycFLi3RBIHgGIW58SJvzkmvfBTiDGGRxdry-nXERnaFjUcKzGBGgI1l59BFX25IO0Qk7p8NrjVckgCrwdtLjleKioZ6TBc8818suHaajpx5-pRC5sLQvv_KFpvcyk5DFOCdmyNb2V7YZwR1HYqme0ZpZHXySKLk7WbyJcEHmzJQGA==), ***SCIENCE*** Executive EditorEarly in the course of the pandemic, my mom dropped off a pile of homemade masks for me and my husband. She’s always been a crafty person, sewing my dresses when I was in preschool and making many a Halloween costume from scratch. So it was no surprise that she was able to produce simple cloth masks with layered fabrics that were reasonably comfortable. She even included one special mask just for me—a frothy confection trimmed with cream-colored lace and black silk ribbons fit for a gothic fashion show. “That one’s just for fun,” she emphasized, since the woolly fabric is very porous and not reinforced with a filter.But do we really have to sacrifice fashion for function when it comes to effective face masks? [Not necessarily](https://email.nationalgeographic.com/T/v40000017353cd3787be45426e96638918/b64b59e440544c500000021ef3a0bcc9/b64b59e4-4054-4c50-b35d-3198f1f18373?__dU__=v0G4RBKTXg2GtTHJDsy7ii3waBSrIwMXGZJ7x_OARFKFQAIe3mwx22JG_r9Sy1LWLGyMVrrFIdudbYjwKGAKz6iTAgyV5XAM3SbSN-FzJU9XXpFWtSFRxbGw4nHcgLdnvWYAVcbDlQyQtE1-NmUBscmA==&__F__=v0fUYvjHMDjRPMSh3tviDHXIoXcPxvDgUUCCPvXMWoX_0JoZLAZABQF30xF0sKPois3VqfW5bf1WlfvPhqF6LHwC5xiRF0xcvsaXE6YZgfYFW2h8-XqO1394vHxDR5K4Dv6QQmnAQtVhDyRq82t5N8BiHG1NauT4Y1AhM7UXewMUAKlSE-yn6RaYK-1ROAzD1JlUVA1hQtLKJvXefNIT0OSqAge8KnIBs-rUEu-v_ydkjVqKpglchm7kWsJ_KhkqX8x8mJm3vBv2X_pSmFTuO1EdMeKLefEF3fhAX4tL5dyk0EUMEl4OaR_2b_fOlo4E5LPXX4TUj6NcF0iK65YgUwiz9M8QcX5AmeVs0YeC5IH4GenLuJAH8pvjcLoDrvfxBBx0mCAP5NX1dShLbvHuNly8VyMVGnKGPqGIKfn1No5ofGLfypOjV7Ssn1F_yzJQOb2Z0kqvsP2IwDgXxNdYc64ti-tiLWQM8va2jjkuo-Qmr12V8-R9N8BZ4t_sjpMUegAK6msI9nHf4uWwPhgVQzIP7Je78UifhBQtHNHVuhRjgMDWhlYo3F7k7mJ0wvtc7A), (*please click on this link for more data)* according to the myriad experts who spoke to our reporter **Erin Blakemore**. Since surgical masks and N95 respirators are most urgently needed in hospitals, the public at large is being encouraged to use cloth face coverings, none of which are exactly perfect at blocking potentially dangerous respiratory droplets. Still, something is, in fact, better than nothing. In one recent study, scientists found that a mask made of two layers of cotton quilting fabric stopped droplets from traveling more than 2.5 inches from a person’s face, versus the eight feet those drops reached unimpeded by a mask.The benefits of wearing a mask should be obvious. [But as with any large cultural shift, adopting the practice will take time](https://email.nationalgeographic.com/T/v40000017353cd3787be45426e96638918/b64b59e440544c500000021ef3a0bcca/b64b59e4-4054-4c50-b35d-3198f1f18373?__dU__=v0G4RBKTXg2GtTHJDsy7ii3waBSrIwMXGZJ7x_OARFKFQAIe3mwx22JG_r9Sy1LWLGyMVrrFIdudbYjwKGAKz6iTAgyV5XAM3SbSN-FzJU9XXpFWtSFRxbGw4nHcgLdnvWYAVcbDlQyQtE1-NmUBscmA==&__F__=v0fUYvjHMDjRPMSh3tviDHXIoXcPxvDgUUCCPvXMWoX_0JoZLAZABQF30xF0sKPois3VqfW5bf1WlfvPhqF6LHwC5xiRF0xcvsaXE6YZgfYFUJOqVwGmYvlZdFMOE-xySeQBNtg-FswWh6BO9SCSbZ128p4t5nmS6x8AA39I7FveYL6aoDraMS1FBQDhLH644IkTr0ggSzQ1VFSidUILWLdzKWuSrRmSOK8R1cl4UR3e-vPcq6YO-3mDADRrLjdWyP5gvOnK7Swhd_Go8V6YiCXR2Iyqln0VlHrp-15qC4HwaZCVlGgIIEc6tOmuN9a7QeliDwpNdo4FKN43xjx2Eqcwl_swnDSYa3rryac7xaMTJaWhojlgyZkNzizJH5OdZ5YmJWEKg229ZAVY8jIw7DOViBj-0EQu9vgoNq8G0J0628nPVghd_-dRowkzX-6ymX3w88xZiiaoY_TnTJk58lZDe7xi7Zv_cjOiu0y4lv1FSbUhueiVX9dD6FRxQDKUlIyl6as1E0uhekhuaRDYwGhhNFz7OyUzl9a2CL-UpEfpQMxWRNpxKZKr9gHxbGqikq). Currently, just 60 percent of people in the U.S. always wear some kind of face covering when they leave home, [according to a National Geographic and Morning Consult poll](https://email.nationalgeographic.com/T/v40000017353cd3787be45426e96638918/b64b59e440544c500000021ef3a0bccb/b64b59e4-4054-4c50-b35d-3198f1f18373?__dU__=v0G4RBKTXg2GtTHJDsy7ii3waBSrIwMXGZJ7x_OARFKFQAIe3mwx22JG_r9Sy1LWLGyMVrrFIdudbYjwKGAKz6iTAgyV5XAM3SbSN-FzJU9XXpFWtSFRxbGw4nHcgLdnvWYAVcbDlQyQtE1-NmUBscmA==&__F__=v0fUYvjHMDjRPMSh3tviDHXIoXcPxvDgUUCCPvXMWoX_0JoZLAZABQF30xF0sKPois3VqfW5bf1WlfvPhqF6LHwC5xiRF0xcvsaXE6YZgfYFVpyqfuaVV0ar7Nb7uJdyIDQbC_aZfIY61DKpGwKHoTFuksdfuzIAwcb-v1LLUtYsbIxWusUh251tiPAoYArPqJMCDJXlcAzdJtI34XMlT1dekVa1IVHFsbHP76VyppatzBEeh5wdscR1xleVprn6wZKbDEysaquhF1HLze39FtVhbu9-CEJML2QBckWjsFF2Qv3B31bqQOdotx1DjyxvcS-xxACbGgZDG2ydrjQXju5ItC00z3gNR4Tamkpl_MglICTG5dmwz0ClE6gUMGGtRRmvo7d6ZXJIiPkSd6yDKnMRmlYtNFCR1twyn6RQNUYipl0yXU0WfYchh1QLHbgLaYMgNy9rOlNu5qxpSVpnsgB662Mxb9f_P2PpFDx3n6db5D2PMf6tLrpt_705XBPbfd_gBhh53ZgL8=). (I was disappointed to see fellow GenXers were the least likely to take this simple safety precaution.) Putting aside political divides, common complaints about mask-wearing include discomfort and difficulty breathing, though I have to imagine vanity plays a role. Luckily, Blakemore reports, innovators from nanotech scientists to fashion designers are already stepping up to find solutions that will make masks more breathable, more beautiful, and more inclusive.I choose to keep my glass half full and believe that at some point, we’ll get new treatments, [develop a vaccine](https://email.nationalgeographic.com/T/v40000017353cd3787be45426e96638918/b64b59e440544c500000021ef3a0bccc/b64b59e4-4054-4c50-b35d-3198f1f18373?__dU__=v0G4RBKTXg2GtTHJDsy7ii3waBSrIwMXGZJ7x_OARFKFQAIe3mwx22JG_r9Sy1LWLGyMVrrFIdudbYjwKGAKz6iTAgyV5XAM3SbSN-FzJU9XXpFWtSFRxbGw4nHcgLdnvWYAVcbDlQyQtE1-NmUBscmA==&__F__=v0fUYvjHMDjRPMSh3tviDHXIoXcPxvDgUUCCPvXMWoX_0JoZLAZABQF30xF0sKPois3VqfW5bf1WlfvPhqF6LHwC5xiRF0xcvsaXE6YZgfYFXMPRmgke-bG5XlpwIkXV2_4i50pRWmDdQvrTkNfCTWRYu0DxLhTp8_OYJ89Xu05ZcMuNKs3ol5TqqAmZS6nwhDg-r_JMVAgcNNWMDOnSmeOYwxzJp2rQfMMDpqj8bl7Pnsq0L-lE3awFtpWAoU-9Guqz8nKQ4qVE0RLSPaqVmLcjptQDXTBExYQIJ884XviMFmo2MRjo4myEBGRFk0Yc2A_R5bOg6cPdIFLmjwNbDvNXD-m7hHaIrZ_Ao3AouNnfjbPoh0k7o9zt7w2ZpjUlHV1NO7dxGJGR6Pt2sG63kYxpaT9t1kyWhXy1s7SnQi5LfBpdAM41evEMONBJwS6OQHHBcieHFYC_StshJiV-3QYxvF17YFXT0j4pQqAVE4Glo5IQlExjnWjyQOTKQ-MsI5EnnBxM3IFNN9hB9bkdWliugUqZayp1OmUb_EdIkgPeQ=), and find our way out of this nightmare. In the meantime, I applaud efforts to build a better mask that will hopefully encourage everyone to embrace a simple accessory—and to care, not just about your safety, but the well-being of others. |

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