

Best materials to make a homemade face mask

NEW YORK: • Using doubled up 600-thread count pillowcases or flannel pajamas, you could make a mask that provides up to 60 percent filtration.

• Other materials that can be used to filter out dangerous particles include HEPA filters, vacuum cleaner bags, and quilting cotton.

• But be careful of materials like household air filters that may contain fiberglass. They could still damage your lungs, even if they filter out virus particles.

Earlier this month, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Trusted Source began advising Americans to wear face coverings in public to “slow the spread” of COVID-19. However, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) reports the supply of surgical masks (and other protective gear) could run short during the pandemic — meaning little availability of masks for people in the United States. “The FDA is aware that as the COVID-19 outbreak continues to expand globally, the supply chain for these devices will continue to be stressed if demand exceeds available supplies,” the agency said in a statement Trusted Source. The solution, according to health officials, is to improvise. Making

your own mask at home: US Surgeon General Dr. Jerome Adams posted a video to Twitter earlier this month explaining how to improvise your own face mask. But making DIY protection involves careful consideration of what you have to work with.

Some materials can filter particles better than others, significantly affecting how well your homemade mask may protect you from infection. “Cloth face coverings fashioned from household items or made at home from common materials at low cost can be used as an additional, voluntary public health measure,” the CDC said in statement Trusted Source. “It’s very unfortunate that the CDC and the surgeon general’s office initially, because they were panicked at masks being hoarded and unavailable for health workers, chose to address that by telling people that masks aren’t helpful. Masks are always helpful,” Dr. Benjamin LaBrot, founder and CEO of Floating Doctors and a clinical professor of medical education at the Keck School of Medicine of University of Southern California, told Healthline. “Whether they filter well or not, they are very helpful at protecting other people as well, especially from silent infections,” he said.

How homemade masks help: People with “silent infections” are asymptomatic. They don’t have fevers, coughs, or other typical symptoms of COVID-19. They could, unknowingly, spread the virus to others, finds a recently published study Trusted Source that examined infections of residents in a King County, Washington, nursing home. If they wear a mask they can protect others, even if it isn’t a N95 mask. “When an otherwise credible source comes out with something that’s essentially a lie — even if it’s for the good intentions of trying to make sure people didn’t hoard masks — now it means that people will look more skeptically on real information provided by those previously credible sources,” LaBrot added.

The best materials for homemade masks: According to LaBrot, a surgical mask (that’s not an N95) only filters out about 60 to 65 percent of particles, which is normal for this type of mask. He explains that by using doubled up 600-thread count pillowcases or flannel pajamas, you could make a mask that provides up to 60 percent filtration. He emphasizes that “anyone can figure this out,” and that the “light test” is an easy way to tell how well a material may filter. —Health Line



How just half a tablespoon of olive oil a day can improve heart health

It’s long been known that the Mediterranean diet is one of the healthiest overall diets. Now, research shines new light on the ways that one of the diet’s main components — olive oil — helps boost heart health.

Researchers presented their findings today at the American Heart Association’s (AHA) Lifestyle and Cardiometabolic Health Scientific Sessions in Phoenix. Their analysis of long-term data, dating back to 1990, shows that eating more than 1/2 tablespoon of olive oil per day lowers one’s risk of cardiovascular disease by 15 percent and the risk of coronary heart disease by 21 percent. While consumption of olive oil has been associated with improved heart health for years, the new research shows these associations with a U.S.-based population for the first time.

“Mostly, these associations have been shown in the past in Mediterranean and European populations,” Marta Guasch-Ferre, PhD, lead author of the study and a research scientist in the department of nutrition at Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health in Boston, told Healthline. “But until now, there was no previous study that showed results in a U.S. population.”

New wrinkles: The health benefits of olive oil are well understood, according to Dr. Benjamin Hirsh, director of preventive cardiology at Northwell Health’s Sandra Atlas Bass Heart Hospital in Manhasset, New York. “Olive oil is a simple way to replace unhealthy, saturated, and trans-fatty acids of animal fats with a source of omega-3 fatty acids that reduce inflammation and improve cholesterol,” Hirsh told Healthline. “It has also been associated with improved vascular function, heart health, and survival.” Animal-based fats such as margarine, butter, dairy fat, and mayonnaise are less healthy than olive oil when it comes to supporting heart health.

An intriguing detail uncovered in the new study shows that olive oil isn’t the only oil that contains these benefits. Guasch-Ferre said that researchers also saw positive associations with other plant oils, such as corn or safflower oil, although more research is needed to confirm the effects of plant oils on health outcomes. “While olive oil was better than animal fat when we did the substitution analysis, they were not superior to vegetable oils,” she explained. “This means that other vegetable oils could be a healthy alternative compared to animal fat, especially because they tend to be more affordable in the U.S. compared to olive oil.” Guasch-Ferre also pointed out that these findings are consistent with current recommendations that highlight the quality, rather than the quantity, of fat intake. She adds that the study led to new questions, and more data will undoubtedly add to the overall understanding of the relationship between olive oil and heart health. “One thing that we couldn’t analyze here was the different types of olive oil — whether it was common olive oil or extra virgin olive oil. There’s some evidence showing that extra virgin olive oil varieties have higher amounts of polyphenols that are associated with better lipid profiles and less inflammation,” she said. “It would be interesting to see the effects of different varieties, along with the effects of different vegetable oils on health outcomes, along with defining the underlying mechanisms of these associations,” Guasch-Ferre added.

Well-rounded approach: While replacing animal fats with healthier alternatives such as olive or vegetable oil is a strong step toward improved cardiovascular health, it’s hardly the be-all and end-all. Good heart health also includes physical activity, a balanced diet and, ideally, visits with a doctor to stay on track. —Health Line



NEWCASTLE: If you’re a smoker, there’s really never been a better time to quit. Coronavirus affects your lungs, causing flu-like symptoms such as fever, cough, shortness of breath, sore throat and fatigue. In the most serious cases, sufferers struggle to breathe at all and can die of respiratory failure.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) recommends people quit smoking as it makes them more vulnerable to COVID-19 infection. Here’s what we know about smoking and COVID-19 risk — and how you can boost your chances of quitting while under lockdown.

SMOKING AND COVID-19 RISK: Early data from China suggests smoking history is one factor that risks poor outcomes in COVID-19 patients. According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, smoking is a leading risk factor for chronic disease and death. Smokers are more susceptible to developing heart disease, which so far seems to be the highest risk factor for the COVID-19 death rate. The Centre for Evidence-Based Medicine at the University of Oxford reports that smoking seemed to be a factor associated with poor survival in Italy, where 24 percent of people smoke. We know that immunosuppressed people are at higher risk if they get COVID-19 and cigarette smoke is an immunosuppressant. And the hand-to-mouth action of smoking makes smokers vulnerable to COVID-19 as they are touching their mouth and face more often. We don’t yet know if recent ex-smokers are at higher risk of COVID-19 than people who have never smoked. Given the lungs heal rapidly after quitting smoking, being an ex-smoker is likely to decrease your chances of complications due to COVID-19.

QUITTING WILL REDUCE RISKS: The benefits of quitting smoking are almost immediate. Within 24 hours of quitting, the body starts to recover and repair. Lung function improves and respiratory symptoms become less severe. Smokers remove their protective face masks at the smoking area outside Raffles City Shopping Centre you might not notice the changes immediately, but they will become obvious within months of quitting. And the improvements are sustained with long-term abstinence. Tiny hairs in your lungs and airways (called cilia) get better at clearing mucus and debris. You’ll start to notice you’re

Smokers, you have a higher risk of COVID-19 infection



breathing more easily. Symptoms of chronic bronchitis, such as chronic cough, mucus production and wheeze, decrease rapidly. Among people with asthma, lung function improves within a few months of quitting and treatments are more effective. Respiratory infections such as bronchitis and pneumonia also decrease with quitting.

People should seek behavioural counselling support to work through motivations to quit, strategies for dealing with triggers, and distraction techniques. And you can get behavioural support from your doctor or a psychologist via telephone helplines in your state or territory or online. Several studies suggest that some people quit smoking without assistance. If you feel you need extra help, talk to your doctor about nicotine gum, patches, inhalators, lozenges or prescription medications. If you can’t get in to see a GP, you can try a telehealth consultation or consider over-the-counter products.

QUITTING WHILE IN LOCKDOWN: Physical distancing and lockdown measures may make it more challenging to get the support you need to quit smoking — but not impossible. A man wearing an N95 mask smokes a cigarette in Singapore. If financial stress is undermining your attempts to stop smoking, calculate how much money you can save by quitting, and whatever you do, don’t share cigarettes with someone else. Financial support is available if COVID-19 has affected your income. Social support, even during lockdown, is crucial. Why not organise a group of friends also wanting to quit and support each other via Houseparty, Zoom or Skype? Pandemic or no pandemic, smoking poses an enormous risk to your health — and hurts your finances, too. Any effort you put in now to reduce your smoking or stub it out altogether will reduce your risk if you do get COVID-19, help you live longer and enjoy a higher quality of life. We wish you the very best of luck with it. Billie Bonevski is the Women in Science Chair, Caitlin Bialek is Research Assistant and Eliza Skelton is Research Academic at the Faculty of Health and Medicine. They are all based at the University of Newcastle. This commentary first appeared in The Conversation. —CNA

Spring fruit: Mulberry prices double in Lahore

LAHORE: Sale of spring fruit mulberry has started in various areas of Lahore, but its price has doubled as compared to last year. Green Badana mulberry is being sold for Rs600 per kilogramme, while black mulberry is being sold for Rs480 per kg.

The forest department has prepared 30,000 saplings for growing mulberry in greenhouses, out of which 15,000 have been distributed. The sale of mulberry fruit begins in April and May. Green and black mulberry can be seen in the market these days. Green mulberry is known as Badana Mulberry and is more expensive than the black variety. Agriculture expert Rizwan Ahmed said that two varieties of mulberry are common in Pakistan’s markets. One of them is ‘Mahi’, which is brought from abroad. Its special quality is that its fruit is very succulent and sweet. The expert said the other variety is ‘Kalkati’, which is planted in the vicinity of Lahore. Even though the fruit of the Kalkati species is longer and thicker than Mahi, it is less sweet than the Mahi mulberry. Cultivation of the Mahi variety could not succeed in Lahore but it has thrived in Faisalabad due to its climate. Forest, Wildlife and Fisheries Department’s Sericulture Deputy Director Farooq Bhatti said most of the mulberry trees in Punjab are in the forest of Changa Manga. Some trees are planted

just to harvest leaves for feeding silkworm while some produce longer mulberries.

He added that this year 30,000 mulberry saplings were planted in nurseries, out of which 15,000 have been sold while the rest are in the stock. “A mulberry plant costs Rs20, while in private nurseries it is sold for Rs200 to Rs300,” he said. Bhatti said the most popular mulberry fruit is smaller but tasty and has medical benefits.

Although it is extremely sweet, a sourness accompanying it makes its taste unique. The fruit is three to four inches long. The green variety is very sweet and the black one isn’t that sweet and sour and is called shahtoot. Experts said that the mulberry fruit is not only used for the beverages but also as dry fruit.

In addition, it is also used in medicines. Lahore has an abundance of mulberry farms near Shakarpur. A farmer of mulberry, Choudhry Abdul Hameed, said that the amount of fruit a tree pro-

duces depends on its age and health. He maintained that 80 to 100 trees are planted on one acre which starts producing the fruit in approximately one and a half months. “If an average yield of a tree is one maund, 80 maunds of mulberry will be obtained from one acre,” he said. If the mulberry is sold at Rs300 per kg in the market, then Rs950,000 will be earned from one acre, while the cost is Rs300,000. He further said that his employees start picking the mulberry fruit at 7am every day and by 1pm they collect four to five maunds of the fruit. “The fruit is then packed in large baskets and taken to the major markets of Lahore,” he said.

However, experts say the mulberry tree cultivation has reduced due to a disease, which causes its roots to rot. At first, the leaves of the tree begin to turn yellow and then the tree starts to dry up. —



The Business Report

Can clothes, shoes track COVID-19 into your house? What to know

LONDON: Most household detergents are sufficient to kill the virus when doing laundry.

All data and statistics are based on publicly available data at the time of publication. Some information may be out of date. Visit our coronavirus hub and follow our live updates page for the most recent information on the COVID-19 outbreak. Even if you’re doing your best in a self-quarantine situation to keep yourself safe, how do you keep the novel coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2, from getting in? You’re only making essential trips out for groceries.

When you go out you practice safe social distancing. You wash your hands frequently and disinfect “high contact” surfaces like doorknobs and countertops when you get home.

Still, there’s a nagging feeling that even though you’re maintaining good hygiene, you’re worried about the objects you’ve brought home with you. Are your groceries safe? Plastic bags? What about the clothes you’re wearing? Your shoes? There are certain inevitable truths to going shopping, and one of them is that you’re going to wear shoes and clothes to do it. Here’s what we know about the transmission of the novel coronavirus through common articles of clothing. The minute Healthline learns the latest, you will too. Get updates, breakthroughs, and ways to stay ahead of COVID-19.

Clothes are low risk: “There’s a lot we don’t know about this virus, and we are learning more about it every day. But this is our current understanding: If you are out for

a run in your neighborhood or making a quick visit to the grocery store, it is highly unlikely that you would contract COVID-19 via your clothes or shoes. We don’t believe shoes or clothing are a significant source of transmission,” Dr. Vincent Hsu, MPH, a board-certified internal medicine, infectious diseases, and preventive medicine physician at AdventHealth in Orlando, told Healthline.

According to Hsu, there have been no documented cases of transmission of the novel coronavirus via clothing and shoes at this point. COVID-19, the flu-like respiratory illness caused by the novel coronavirus, is spread by respiratory droplets. Coughing and sneezing by an infected individual in close proximity to another person are the most likely means of direct transmission.

However, we do know that the novel coronavirus is capable of surviving outside the human body on different surfaces, which can result in transmission if touched.

Depending on the type of surface, experts estimate that the virus can survive for just a few hours up to a few days.

While metal and plastic can provide a haven for the virus for up to 2 to 3 days, clothing is not considered a material conducive to its survival. “Our best studies in this area are with influenza and other previously known viruses, but clothing in general is not thought to be the best incubator of viruses,” Dr. Kathleen Jordan, an infectious disease specialist and vice president at CommonSpirit Health, told Healthline. Humidity and moisture play a significant environmental role in whether or not a virus can thrive. The nature of most cloth

materials is not conducive to this. “Clothing is usually more of a mesh than a hard surface, which could potentially aerate the environment more readily,” said Jordan. Transfer of the virus via clothing is unlikely, but the experts interviewed by Healthline agreed there are a few scenarios in which immediate laundering is a good idea.

If you are taking care of or frequently in close proximity to an individual with COVID-19, doing laundry often is an essential part of preventive hygiene. This includes, in particular, high risk individuals such as healthcare workers. The average trip to the grocery store shouldn’t necessitate doing the laundry as soon as you get home. However, if you haven’t been able to keep a safe social distance from others or, even worse, someone has coughed or sneezed in your direct vicinity, washing those clothes would be a good idea. But, in general, focusing on other areas of hygiene such as keeping hands clean and not touching your face is more important than laundering clothes.

“We do know that social distancing is our most effective means of controlling transmission. So going to the grocery store obviously is a break in our usual patterns of social distancing. To take extra precautions you would certainly use hand hygiene going in as well as going out and management of anything that could potentially have been touched or handled by other persons. Any hygiene you can add to that practice is additive,” said Jordan. When doing laundry at home, killing the virus shouldn’t take any additional effort. Most household detergents are sufficient. —Health Line