

Jay learns to stitch masks, with a little help from Aiji

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Jay was sitting at the doorway of his house. This was as close to the “outside” he was allowed to be nowadays. Since the lockdown was announced, everyone was under strict orders from his aunt, Sunitha who was a doctor, not to go outside. Mainly to avoid exposing his ageing grandmother to the virus. Jay’s father was designated as the only person in the household to go out and that too only to get supplies. Every few days, when he went out, he stopped at the pharmacy to buy more medical masks.

Jay’s elder brother Deepu was at home too. Since his college roommate had been diagnosed with CoViD19, Deepu was in self quarantine in his room at home. He had to stay in his room, wear a mask all day and remove it only when he went to sleep. Jay had gotten used to seeing the gloomy mask on Deepu’s face every time he came out of his room to use the bathroom. But the masks that Jay was seeing people wear on the streets were so colourful these days!



“Maaa... What are all these colourful masks? Can we get one for Deepu Anna to wear in his room also?” Jay shouted into the house in the general direction of his mother. “It’s probably just homemade cloth masks.” said Jyothi, his mother, as she came over to hush him: “Don’t scream so loudly about your brother -- People will think he has CoViD19! He’s only under quarantine and wearing those masks to be extra safe like Sunitha Chitti told us.”

Jay came back into the house annoyed at being hushed. He decided to look up cloth masks online and was soon full of more questions. This time for his grandmother “Ajji! Can you stitch masks? Do we have a sewing machine?”

“My eyesight hasn’t been good enough to do any stitching for many years now.” replied Ajji. “Can we stitch masks at home? Can you teach me how to stitch?” Jay started with his next set of questions but his grandmother had stopped listening. She had also not left the house in weeks and was missing her regular gossip sessions with the other neighbourhood ladies. She had never liked using the phone. She wasn’t about to start now and was stuck wondering if her friends were all well.



Jay went back to convincing his mother about cloth masks
“From what I read, the cloth masks are enough to stop Appa from spreading the virus when he’s outside. In case he even has it. Ask Chitti!”

Jyothi’s sister, Sunitha was a doctor in a local government hospital. She had been very busy recently, but would make sure to call every few days at least to find out about their mother, Jay’s Aiji. The last time, Sunitha had mentioned the scarcity of surgical masks in the hospital. This was worrying Jyothi: “Maybe all of us using these cloth masks could allow Sunitha to get the medical masks that she and her co-workers need...” she thought.



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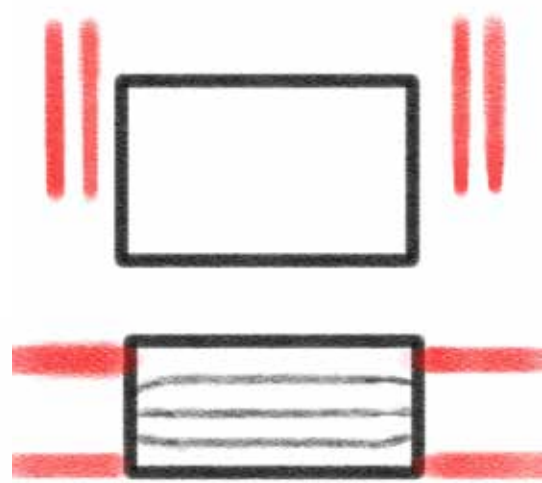
Later that day, Jyothi took out Ajji's old box of stitching items and seeing it, Ajji decided to get involved too. "What is this used for? What is this hook for? How do you thread a needle?" Jay started. Unlike her mother, Jyothi had never had the patience to stitch and was happy to hand over Jay and his questions to her mother. Ajji started off by teaching Jay a few simple stitches. Next, Jay found a pattern that had 3 layers and read through the stitching instructions with Ajji. Jyothi found some old cotton pillow covers that they could cut up and use. The next day Jay got down to making a mask.

That night there was a long discussion at home about using cloth masks. Both Jay and his mother tried to argue for it, but his father still seemed unconvinced. Jay washed the mask in detergent and set it out to dry anyway.



A few days later, Jay saw his father getting ready to go out wearing the cloth mask that he had made! “Appa! You look so cheerful with that mask on! Did you change your mind after looking in the mirror?” Jay asked.

“Well, of course I like to look cheerful! But I did look up some government websites about cloth masks and we also spoke to Sunitha Chitti. She said it’s perfectly OK for me to wear a cloth mask outside but it’s probably better for now if Deepu Anna continues to use the medical masks -- the chance that he has the virus is slightly higher. She also texted Amma this morning to say that the people she works with want to thank you for starting this: less medical masks for us means more for them! Do you and Ajji want to make more masks not only for us but for our friends also?”



Ajji borrowed a friend's old sewing machine and taught Jay to use it. As the days went by, Jay started to spend less time longing to be outside and more time cutting and stitching! Ajji too was enjoying reviving an old skill: even if her eyesight would only allow for her to be Jay's cutting assistant every now and then. But whenever Jay found a new mask pattern, he would tell her about it and they would chat endlessly about the details.

“I only know how to make simple blouses, but maybe when all this is over, I can introduce you to my friend Kalpana's son down the road. He's a tailor -- he could teach you how to stitch almost anything!” Ajji said. “Can't wait!” replied Jay as he threaded the needle to start stitching the next mask.

These are meant to portray typical scenarios and contextualise the information we provide. Necessarily this simplifies the content. Please make sure that you go through the accompanying documents on the website for scientific accuracy.

