Nosebleeds

Nosebleeds are common

Nosebleeds occur at all ages but are very common in children. They occur when a small blood vessel, often just inside the nostril, bursts. These vessels are numerous and are covered by a very thin delicate lining.

Why do I get nosebleeds?

Common causes of nosebleeds include:

- Environment - hot dry weather, very cold dry weather (mountains and snow)
- Infections, viral colds or flus, or local sinus infections
- Nose picking or sticking hard objects in the nose (particularly in children)
- Trauma, from a knock on the nose
- Bleeding disorders or being on blood thinners
- Pushing hard while going to the toilet
- Heavy lifting
- Crying and screaming

In the hospital

Tell the doctor if you feel faint or very unwell immediately. In some circumstances nose bleeds can lead to significant blood loss.

The first line of treatment is to put some spray in your nose and apply constant pressure for 10 minutes. The spray constricts the vessels and applying pressure will stop most bleeds. Constant means not checking until 10 minutes are up. Some Emergency Departments will provide a device to hold your nose.

Children will rarely manage to hold their own nose for 10 minutes.

Ointment, with or without antibiotics, can be used to help keep the area moist and prevent rebleeding.

If pressure fails there are two options available in most Emergency Departments. Chemical cautery can be done where a stick is applied around the bleeding vessels and antibiotic ointment is applied. The other treatment is to pack the nose. This is used for bleeding that occurs in the front of the nose (the most common) and the back of the nose (the more serious). Packing comes in many forms from gauze to special inflatable packers and they are left in, sometimes for up to two days.

When your nose is packed you will most likely be prescribed antibiotics.

If you are discharged, before you leave the hospital you should be clear who you see next and when to remove the pack. Do not do this yourself.

When you get home

You should avoid all the things that might make your nose bleed again including:

- Avoid any exertion for a day or heavy physical exertion for week
- Don’t pick your nose, blow your nose for 12 hours and don’t blow it hard at all
- Avoid hot drinks

Things you should do straight away:

- If you have a nasal pack then keep your appointments to remove that (often at 2 days)
- Take antibiotics if prescribed
- Use Vaseline or the ointment given to you by the doctor as directed
- Rest quietly for the next 12 to 24 hours.
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When you get home cont.

Things you can do in the long term:

- Use nasal toileting instead of picking (available from chemist)
- Keep nose moist - with Vaseline and a humidifier in the bedroom
- Don’t smoke and avoid smoky areas.

When to worry?

Most nosebleeds are minor but sometimes they can be serious.

In the elderly and frail person blood loss may be significant and life-threatening so call for help or for an ambulance if help is not at hand.

If you are on blood thinners you may have a serious bleed. You should apply pressure and get help.

Whilst rare, tumours inside the nose may be a cause of recurrent or unusual nosebleeds. You should see an ENT doctor for examination if this is a concern.

If you had a minor bleed and it has happened again try pressure for 10 minutes, following the instructions you were given.

Do not leave nose packs in for longer than 2 days without seeing a doctor

If you get another nosebleed

You may be able to treat another nosebleed at home:

- Sit upright and lean forward
- If you have vaso constricting nose sprays (e.g. Otrivin) then gently blow your nose to remove the blood clots and use two sprays while gently breathing in through the nose
- Squeeze the soft part of your nose for 10 minutes
- You might have to have more than one attempt to stop the bleeding
- Do not look or peek for 10 minutes
- Be mindful that children will not do it themselves
- An ice pack at the bridge of the nose may help but pressure is the key
- If the bleeding is profuse, even when squeezing, this may be a serious bleed so you should see a doctor or go to the Emergency Department if you feel faint or very unwell.

Instructions:


Disclaimers: This health information is for general education purposes only. Always consult with your doctor or other health professional to make sure this information is right for you.