



GLOBAL HEALTH PHARMACY

ASK YOUR GLOBAL HEALTH PHARMACIST

News from your Global Health Education Center

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Nosebleed: Prevention and Treatment

Nosebleed (clinically known as epistaxis) is quite common. Many people may experience a nosebleed at any given moment in time and in any setting. According to the American Academy of Otolaryngology, one in every seven people will suffer a nosebleed. Nosebleeds can occur at any age but most commonly occur in children aged 2-10 years, and adults aged 50-80 years.

WHY DO PEOPLE GET NOSEBLEEDS?

The nose contains many small blood vessels, and any little irritation or traumatic experience of any intensity to the nose can easily rupture them. When these blood vessels are ruptured, nosebleeds occur as a way to let the blood out. Nosebleeds can either originate from the front (anterior) or back (posterior) area of the nasal septum, the semi-rigid wall that separates the two nostrils. Most nosebleeds occur in the front of the nose because this area contains more blood vessels.

Nosebleeds that occur from the front of the nose begin with a flow of blood out of one nostril when sitting or standing. Those that occur from the back of the nose begin high and deep within the nose and will flow down the back of the mouth and throat, even when sitting or standing. It is important to note the differences between front (posterior) and back (anterior) nosebleeds because the posterior nosebleeds are often more severe and require immediate medical attention.

WHAT CAUSES NOSEBLEED?

Common causes of nosebleed include:

- Dry, heated, indoor air, which can dry up the inner walls of the nose (mucus membranes)
- Hot, low-humidity climates
- Common colds with repeated sneezing, coughing, and nose blowing, which can rupture a blood vessel
- Injury to the nose
- Overuse of decongestant nasal sprays
- Facial and nasal surgery
- Use of drugs that thin the blood (e.g. aspirin, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications, warfarin)
- High blood pressure
- Chemical irritants (e.g., cocaine, industrial chemicals, others)
- Tumors can also cause nosebleed, particularly in older patients and in smokers



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HOW DO YOU STOP A NOSEBLEED?

To stop a nosebleed, you should:

Step 1: Sit down and lean forward slightly to prevent the flow of blood into your throat.

Step 2: Squeeze the soft portion of the nose with thumb and index finger and hold for at least 5 minutes.

Step 3: If still bleeding, hold another 10 minutes.

Step 4: Use cold compress or ice pack on top (bridge) of nose, upper lip, and/or back of neck.

Step 5: Use decongestant sprays (such as Afrin or Neo-syneprine sprayed directly or applied with a cotton swab onto the bleeding site). These topical sprays should not be used for more than 3 to 4 days because they can alter normal behavior of the nose to cause congestion.

Below is an image, which illustrates the first three steps.



HOW DO YOU PREVENT NOSEBLEEDS?

To reduce the frequency of nosebleeds:

- Humidify your home, especially the bedrooms, when the air is dry.
- Set the thermostat to a lower temperature (e.g. 70°F) to keep the heat low in all rooms.
- Avoid injury to the nose lining by forceful blowing, nose picking, or vigorous rubbing.
- Avoid over-use of cold and allergy medications. These can dry your nose when used too often.
- Stop smoking because it dries out the inside of your nose.
- Use a saline nasal spray to moisten dry nasal membranes two or three times daily in each nostril.
- Apply plain Vaseline® or Bacitracin® twice to four times per day with a cotton swab to moisten the lining of the nose. Be sure not to insert the swab more than ¼ inch into your nose.



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WHEN SHOULD YOU SEEK MEDICAL OR EMERGENCY CARE?

Contact a (your) physician or go to an emergency room or urgent care center for severe or chronic nosebleeds:

- Nosebleeds that haven't stopped after 15 to 20 minutes of applying direct pressure to the nose.
- Repeat episodes of nosebleeds.
- Bleeding is rapid or results in large blood loss.
- Bleeding is caused by an injury to the nose.
- Feeling faint or weak after the onset of nosebleed.
- Blood goes down the back of your throat rather than out through the nostrils even though you are sitting down with body and head leaning slightly forward.
- Nosebleed that occurred with the start of a new medication.

Nothing herein constitutes medical advice, diagnosis or treatment, or is a substitute for professional advice. You should always seek the advice of your physician or other medical professional if you have questions or concerns about a medical condition.

References:

- 1) American Academy of Otolaryngology. Nosebleeds. Available at: <http://www.entnet.org/content/nosebleeds>. Accessed 10/08/2016
- 2) Cleveland Clinic. Nosebleeds. Available at: http://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases_conditions/hic_Nosebleed_Epistaxis. Accessed 10/08/2016
- 3) Washington University Sinus Institute. Prevention Tips for Nosebleeds. Available at: <http://sinus.wustl.edu/graphics/assets/documents/6cec410a26f9.pdf>. Accessed 10/08/2016