Nosebleed (Epistaxis)

Having a nosebleed (epistaxis) is common in children. Nosebleeds are usually mild and easily treated. Sometimes bleeding can be more severe. This is usually in older people, or in people with other medical problems such as blood disorders. Get medical help quickly if the bleeding is severe, or if it does not stop within 20-30 minutes.

What causes a nosebleed (epistaxis)?

The common site for a nosebleed to start is from just inside the entrance of the nostril, on the middle harder part of the nostril (the nasal septum). Here the blood vessels are quite fragile and can rupture easily for no apparent reason. This happens most commonly in children. This delicate area is also more likely to bleed with the following:

- Picking the nose.
- Colds, and blocked stuffy noses such as with hay fever.
- Blowing the nose.
- Minor injuries to the nose.
- Cocaine use.

In the above situations, the bleeding tends to last only a short time and is usually easy to control. The bleeding may last longer and be harder to stop if you have heart failure, a blood clotting disorder, or are taking 'blood thinning' medicines such as warfarin or aspirin.

Some people with high blood pressure (hypertension) have a higher risk of having a nosebleed.

Bleeding sometimes comes from other areas further back in the nose. It is sometimes due to uncommon disorders of the nose, or to serious injuries to the nose.

What is the treatment for a nosebleed (epistaxis)?

For most nosebleeds, simple first aid can usually stop the bleeding.

- If you are not feeling faint, sit up and lean slightly forward.
- With a finger and thumb, pinch the lower fleshy end of the nose completely blocking the nostrils. It is useless to put pressure over the root of the nose or nasal bones. Usually, if you apply light pressure for 10-20 minutes, the bleeding will stop.
- If available, a cold flannel or compress around the nose and front of face will help. The cold helps the blood vessels to close down (constrict) and stop bleeding.
- Once the nosebleed has stopped, do not pick the nose or try to blow out any of the blood remaining in the nostrils. This may cause another nosebleed.
- If you feel faint it is best to lie flat on your side.

Get medical help quickly if bleeding is heavy, or it does not stop within 20-30 minutes. Sometimes, to stop the bleeding, the nose needs to be packed by a doctor. Rarely, a nosebleed is so heavy that a blood transfusion is needed, and surgery may be required to stop it.
**Recurring nosebleed (epistaxis)**

Some people have recurring nosebleeds. They may not be heavy and they soon stop; however, they can become distressing. In this situation you may be referred to an Ear Nose and Throat unit. It is often possible to 'burn' (cauterise) the bleeding point. This is normally a minor procedure which is usually successful in stopping recurrent bleeds.

Alternatively, your GP may be able to perform cauterisation in your local surgery. In some cases an antibiotic cream is given to use either on its own or after having cauterisation.

**Further reading & references**

- Epistaxis (nosebleeds); NICE CKS, February 2015 (UK access only)

**Disclaimer:** This article is for information only and should not be used for the diagnosis or treatment of medical conditions. Patient Platform Limited has used all reasonable care in compiling the information but makes no warranty as to its accuracy. Consult a doctor or other healthcare professional for diagnosis and treatment of medical conditions. For details see our conditions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author: Dr Roger Henderson</th>
<th>Peer Reviewer: Prof Cathy Jackson</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Document ID: 4371 (v40)</td>
<td>Last Checked: 31/08/2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Next Review: 31/08/2019</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

View this article online at: patient.info/ears-nose-throat-mouth/nosebleed-epistaxis-leaflet

Discuss Nosebleed (Epistaxis) and find more trusted resources at Patient.