

Patient Information

Epistaxis (nosebleeds)

Ears, Nose and Throat Department



Introduction

Nosebleeds are usually mild and can easily be treated at home. However, sometimes bleeding can be more severe and can occur in older people, especially those with some blood disorders or taking blood thinning medications. If the bleeding is severe or if it does not stop within 20-30 minutes, seek urgent medical help.

What causes nosebleeds?

Nosebleeds usually start from the nasal septum (the partition between the nostrils) where the blood vessels are quite fragile. Often there is no apparent trigger for a nosebleed but some common causes are:

- Colds, sneezing and blocked nose, such as with hay fever
- Dry nasal mucosa (i.e. in air-conditioned rooms with dry air)
- Nose picking
- Blowing the nose
- Nose injuries
- High blood pressure
- Physical or emotional stress
- Cocaine use
- Nasal polyps (benign growths on the inside of the nasal lining)
- Foreign bodies (usually in children)

What is the treatment for nosebleeds?

For simple nosebleeds first aid will usually stop the bleeding. If you are not feeling faint, sit up and slightly lean forward. Pinch your nose tightly with a finger and thumb over the fleshy bits of the nostrils and do not let go for at least 20 minutes. The direct pressure stops the bleeding and allows the bleeding site to clot.



Once the nosebleed has stopped, do not blow or pick your nose in order to remove any clots as this can restart nose bleeding. Vaseline or antibiotic ointment for topical use may be advised for self-administration to keep the nasal mucosa moist and well lubricated to prevent rebleeding.

What if the nosebleed doesn't stop?

This is when people usually attend the Emergency Department. Sometimes, the bleeding may be persistent and may not stop, or it may be coming from further back in the nose (posterior bleed). In those cases, bleeding is usually heavy and difficult to control by pinching the nose only. Such patients may start feeling light headed and/or swallow large amounts of blood which may make them sick. In these cases, there are several treatment options:

Cauterization (burning) – When the bleeding site can be identified on inspection, the doctor or nurse practitioner may choose to cauterize it and thus stop the bleeding. This is a simple and quick procedure using an applicator with a chemical on the tip (silver nitrate). An anesthetic spray may be used as it can feel a little uncomfortable. Silver nitrate can cause temporary dark staining of the skin under the nose; it can be wiped off promptly with water. Cauterization may also be used to prevent recurrent nosebleeds, i.e. when the bleeding has already stopped but the exposed blood vessel is within sight on inspection.

Floseal – It is a dissolvable hemostatic foamy agent which is used to fill up your nasal cavity. It mostly works instantly to stop the bleeding. If your bleeding stops, you may be sent home with it as it is very safe and effective.

Packing of the nose – This is a procedure carried out when the nosebleed is profuse (excessive) and not settling with the above measures. It consists of packing the nasal cavity with impregnated ribbon gauze or a special inflatable self-lubricating pack (Rapid Rhino) which is left to stay inside the nose once inflated. When packing of the nose is performed, the patient needs to be admitted to the ENT ward for further observation and specialist treatment.

Additional measures – These may need to be taken in cases of profuse nosebleeds with significant blood loss and a resulting drop in the blood pressure or hemoglobin. It may also be when patients are taking blood thinning medicines and delayed clotting is expected. At these times, blood tests need to be taken and intravenous fluids administered (via a vein). Occasionally surgery might be performed to tie up a vessel at the back of your nose in order to stop the bleeding.

Please turn over...

Recurrent nosebleeds

In cases of recurrent (keeps happening) nosebleeds, where no obvious cause can be identified, the patient is stable and the nosebleed has stopped, an outpatient appointment for the ENT clinic may be offered for further investigations and specialist advice.

Useful Telephone Numbers

- Switchboard, Lister Hospital
☎ 01438 314333 - ask for ENT Department
- ENT Nurse Specialist (Monday to Friday, 9am - 5pm)
☎ Mobile: 0778 534 3359 or 0787 639 0290

In an emergency, dial 999 and request an ambulance or attend your nearest Emergency Department.

NHS 111 can help if you have an urgent medical problem and you're not sure what to do. It is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

☎ 111

Useful websites:

www.entuk.org

www.nhs.uk

www.enherts-tr.nhs.uk

www.nhs.uk/conditions/nosebleed/

www.enherts-tr.nhs.uk

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