



American Family Physician[®]

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Information from Your Family Doctor

Nosebleeds

Am Fam Physician. 2005 Jan 15;71(2):312.

What causes nosebleeds?

Nosebleeds happen when the lining of your nose is hurt or gets dry. This damages the blood vessels in your nose.

Nose picking is a common cause of nosebleeds. Irritation of the inside of your nose from allergies, infections, or the drying effects of heat or air also can cause nosebleeds.

The nasal septum is the wall that divides your nose into left and right sides. Almost all nosebleeds come from blood vessels in the front part of the nasal septum. This area also is more likely to get dry or be hurt by nose blowing or rubbing.

Blood vessels in the back of the nose bleed much less often than vessels in the front of the nose.

Rarely, growths or other problems can cause nosebleeds.

What can I do to treat nosebleeds?

Most nosebleeds happen in the front of the nose. The first thing you should try is squeezing your nose. Squeeze firmly just below the hard part of your nose, not at the very end of your nose.

Keep squeezing your nose for at least 5 minutes while you are sitting up. If the bleeding does not stop, squeeze your nose again, but this time for 20 minutes. Most often, this squeezing will stop the bleeding.

What should I do if the bleeding does not stop?

See your doctor if your nosebleed does not stop. Your doctor might use a chemical or an electric device to stop the bleeding. This is called cautery (say: kaw-ter-ee).

Your doctor might put special gauze or another material in your nose to put pressure on the bleeding area. You might need to take an antibiotic to keep from getting an infection.

Rarely, people with nosebleeds need surgery. During surgery, a clip or stitch is put on the bleeding blood vessel.

What care does my nose need after treatment?

Applying petroleum jelly or using a saltwater nose spray helps keep your nose from getting dry and bleeding again. The jelly or nose spray is put just inside your nostril on the septum.

Using a humidifier by your bed will help keep your nose from getting too dry at night.

Nasal decongestant may be sprayed on a small wad of cotton. Then the cotton wad can be placed in a bleeding area in the front of the nose for 10 to 15 minutes.

Avoid nose blowing, rubbing, or picking while your nose is healing. If you have allergies, they should be treated to help keep nosebleeds from happening again.

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Next: Pelvic Floor Muscle Exercises (<http://www.aafp.org/afp/2005/0115/p329.html>)

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