



Leaflet: Epistaxis (nosebleeds)

Epistaxis (Nosebleeds)

Epistaxis is the name given to nosebleeds. Nosebleeds are common in children. They are usually mild and easily treated. Sometimes bleeding can be more severe but this is usually in older people or in people with other medical problems such as blood disorders.

What causes nosebleeds?

Nosebleeds are common because the small blood vessels inside the nose are very delicate. These blood vessels can rupture easily for no apparent reason. This happens most commonly in children. The commonest site for a nosebleed to start is in Little's area. This is situated just inside the entrance of the nostril on the nasal septum (the middle harder part of the nostril). Here the blood vessels are particularly fragile and are prone to rupture. This delicate area is more likely to bleed with the following.

- ◆ Picking the nose.
- ◆ Colds and blocked stuffy noses such as hayfever.
- ◆ Blowing the nose.
- ◆ Minor injuries to the nose.

These common causes of nosebleeds generally cause mild bleeding and are usually easy to stop. Other less common causes of nosebleeds are mentioned below. These too may be easy to stop but in some situations the bleeding may be coming from further back in the nose and may become serious and difficult to stop.

- ◆ People with high blood pressure or heart failure. These are usually older people.
- ◆ People with blood clotting disorders.
- ◆ People taking 'blood thinning' drugs (anticoagulants) such as warfarin or aspirin.
- ◆ People with uncommon disorders of the nose or with serious injuries to the nose.

What is the treatment for nosebleeds?

For most nosebleeds, with simple first aid the blood flow can be stopped successfully. If not feeling faint, sit up and place the head 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 nose bones. Usually if light pressure is applied 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 it is best not to pick the nose or try and blow out any of the blood remaining in the nostrils as this may cause another nosebleed. If feeling faint it is best to lie on the side.

If bleeding is heavy or it does not stop within 20-30 minutes then seek medical attention. Sometimes the nose needs to be packed by a doctor to stop the bleeding. Rarely nosebleeds can be so heavy that blood transfusions are required and surgery may be required to stop them.

In some people nosebleeds become a recurring problem. It may be necessary to be referred to an Ear Nose and Throat unit. For common recurring nosebleeds it may be needed to cauterise the bleeding point. This is usually a minor and straightforward procedure.

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