

## Washington University Sinus Institute

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Nosebleeds, clinically known as epistaxis, occur when the membranes lining the inside of the nose are disturbed or irritated enough to cause bleeding. Common causes of nosebleeds are dry air, colds, allergies, medications (especially blood thinners, including aspirin), high altitudes, high blood pressure, and injury from bumping, blowing, or picking the nose.

### Prevention Tips for Nosebleeds

- Humidify your home, especially the bedrooms, when the air is dry. Keep the heat low in the sleeping areas.
- Saline nasal spray (Ocean™ or other brand) can be used several times per day to increase moisture within the nose.
- Apply ointment, such as Ayr™ gel or Vaseline™, to the inside of the nose at bedtime. Use either the tip of your finger or a cotton applicator (Q-tip) to apply.
- Avoid injury to the nose lining by forceful blowing, nose picking, or vigorous rubbing.
- Avoid over-use of cold and allergy medications. These can be drying when used too often.
- Stop smoking. Smoking dries out the inside of your nose.
- Discuss your medications with your ENT physician and/or your primary physician. Often patients require blood thinners, which may make bleeding worse, because of serious medical conditions. Do not stop any medications until directed by a physician.

### Treatment for Nosebleeds

Most nosebleeds are minor and respond to the conservative treatment listed below:

- Lean forward to prevent blood from flowing into your throat. Spit out any blood that accumulates in your mouth or throat. If you swallow the blood, it can irritate your stomach and cause nausea and/or vomiting.
- Do not stuff tissue, cotton, or other material into your nose.
- Blow any clots out of your nose. Do not be alarmed if the bleeding seems to worsen after you blow.
- Spray Afrin (oxymetazoline) into the nose.
- Firmly pinch the nostrils closed by squeezing the soft part of the nose shut, just below the firm nasal bones. Hold steady pressure for 10 minutes. Watch the clock – this can feel like a long time. Resist the urge to “peek” to see if the bleeding has stopped.
- If your nose is still bleeding after 10 minutes, reapply the Afrin spray and hold for another 10 minutes. Most bleeds will stop after 10-30 minutes of direct pressure.

After the bleeding has stopped:

- Avoid forceful nose blowing.
- Do not put anything in your nose except for a light coating of ointment and/or saline nasal spray.
- Avoid strenuous activity, heavy lifting, straining, or any other activity that may increase your blood pressure while your nose is healing for the next several days.
- Avoid taking aspirin (unless previously directed to take by a physician) or ibuprofen for 5-7 days. Use acetaminophen (Tylenol™) for pain or discomfort.

### **Severe or Chronic Nosebleeds**

If your bleeding does not stop after 20-30 minutes, call your physician or go to the emergency room for evaluation. Severe nosebleeds may require cauterization, packing the nose, and occasionally invasive procedures to stop the bleeding.

### **A note about Afrin (oxymetazoline) or Neo-Synephrine nasal sprays**

Afrin and Neo-Synephrine are very good medications for short-term use to help stop bleeding and to relieve congestion in the nose. However, when used for longer than 3-4 days at a time, they can be addicting and alter the normal behavior of the nose causing the congestion to be much worse. Thus, do not use for more than 3-4 days at a time.