

## TREATMENT OF EXPISTAXIS (NOSEBLEEDS)

Nosebleeds are a very common problem for a number of people, but some simple things can help in treatment and prevention of nosebleeds. The nose's job is to warm and humidify the air for efficient oxygen exchange in the lungs, and it does this by having a very rich blood supply close to the lining of the nose. Because of this, it often takes very little to disturb the membranes in the nose and start bleeding. Allergies, mild trauma, dry or cold air, exercise, or infections can all easily start a nosebleed. Included here are simple things that you can do to prevent and to treat nosebleeds.

Especially in the winter time, cool and dry air can overwork the nose and lead to a nosebleed. A few simple things can reduce this effect. Liberal use of nasal saline during the day can help to reverse this drying in the nose. There are multiple forms of saline available over the counter. AYR gel is a non-petroleum product that can also be applied liberally to the lining of the nose, especially at night (when dryness tends to be the worst). Finally, the use of a cool mist humidifier and adequate intake of fluids can help keep the lining of the nose moist and avoid many nosebleeds.

Elevated blood pressure is a frequent cause of nosebleeds. Long-term hypertension causes thinning of the blood vessel walls throughout the body, so that it takes less trauma to break one of the capillaries in the nose and cause a nosebleed. Any patient with frequent nosebleeds should have their blood pressure monitored and treated if necessary. Furthermore, the blood pressure may need to be rapidly decreased during an active bleed, and this may necessitate treatment in an emergency facility with intravenous medications.

There are many medications, both prescription and over-the-counter, which cause thinning of the blood. Aspirin and ibuprofen are the most common of these, but medications including Ginko Biloba, Plavix, and Coumadin (warfarin) can also affect the body's natural ability to form a clot. Prolonged usage of antibiotics and some other medications can also affect clot formation. If possible, when there is significant nosebleeding, these medications should be discontinued for up to two weeks.

If prevention fails to treat a nosebleed, there are several maneuvers and medications which can help. The patient with a nosebleed should keep his or her head higher than their chest, and remaining calm will also help. An ice pack over the nose might be enough to slow blood flow and allow a clot to form. Since the majority of nosebleeds occur from the septum (dividing plate between the sides of the nose), FIRM pressure from the sidewall of the nose onto the septum for at least five minutes will often stop a nosebleed. It is important to push as much of the side of the nose firmly onto the septum to allow a clot to form. Placing tissue or other material not designed for nosebleeds will typically only further traumatize the lining of the nose, and can worsen a nosebleed. Use of Afrin or similar decongestant nasal spray will often shrink the vessels enough to allow a clot to form naturally, or with pressure as described above. It might be necessary to GENTLY blow the nose to allow an clots to be removed before

spraying these medications. The long-term use of these sprays can lead to a physical addiction to their effect, so it is important to limit their use during active bleeding. There are also various over-the-counter topical medications (Nasal Cease, etc.) which can treat nosebleeds, so patients with frequent nosebleeds would be well advised to keep some of these handy.

If the above measures do not control the bleeding after a few attempts, if the bleeding is going down the throat instead of coming out of the nose, or if the bleeding is profuse, please call your physician. At times, it is necessary to have nasal packing placed in order to provide enough pressure to allow a clot to form. In general, patients who have packing need to leave the pack in place for at least 72 hours, and they should be on antibiotics while packing is in place. Many of the packs can be saturated with a saline spray to keep them moist and improve comfort, and Afrin or similar decongestant spray can be used directly on them if active bleeding begins.

I hope that this helps you avoid and treat this fairly common occurrence.

Sincerely,

Mark J. Yanta, M.D.