

Nosebleeds



Although nosebleeds in children can be alarming, they are not usually serious events.

Nosebleeds are inconvenient and messy, but they can usually be stopped with home treatment. Some common causes of nosebleeds are low humidity, colds, allergies, blows to the nose, medications (especially aspirin), high altitudes, and blowing or picking the nose.

Prevention

- Low humidity is a common cause of nosebleeds. Humidify your home, especially the bedrooms, and keep the heat low (60° to 64°) in sleeping areas.
- If your nose becomes very dry, breathe moist air for awhile (like from a shower) and then put a little petroleum jelly on the inside to help prevent bleeding. A saline nasal spray may also help.
- Limit your use of aspirin and other nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) if you have frequent nosebleeds. NSAIDs, such as ibuprofen and naproxen sodium, can cause nosebleeds.
- Try to avoid overusing cold and allergy medications (such as antihistamines, decongestants, and medicated nasal sprays). These medications can help control allergy symptoms, which may reduce the risk of nosebleeds. However, using them too often may actually dry the inside of the nose and cause more bleeding.
- Stop smoking. Smoking dries out the inside of the nose, making nosebleeds more likely.
- Keep your blood pressure under control if you have a history of high blood pressure (hypertension). This will help decrease the risk of nosebleeds.

Home treatment

Follow these steps to stop a nosebleed:

- Sit up straight and tip your head slightly forward. Tilting the head back may cause blood to run down the back of your throat, where you may swallow it. If you swallow blood, it can irritate your stomach and cause vomiting. To avoid this, spit out blood that gathers in your mouth and throat rather than swallowing it.
- Do not try to stuff tissues, cotton, or any other material into the nose to stop the bleeding.
- Blow all the clots out of your nose. This may require fairly forceful blowing, and the bleeding may actually increase when clots come out of the nose.
- Firmly pinch the soft part of your nose shut between your thumb and forefinger after blowing out the clots. (The nose consists of a hard bony part and a softer part made of cartilage. Nosebleeds usually occur in the soft part.)

- Keep pinching for a full 10 minutes. Because it can seem like a long time, use a clock to time the full 10 minutes. Resist the urge to peek after a few minutes to see if your nose has stopped bleeding.
- After 10 minutes, check to see if your nose is still bleeding. If it is, hold it for 10 more minutes. Most nosebleeds will stop after 10 to 30 minutes of direct pressure.
- Stay quiet for a few hours. Do not blow your nose or put anything inside your nose except a light coating of a moisturizing ointment (such as Vaseline) for at least 12 hours after the bleeding has stopped.

After you have stopped a nosebleed, the following tips may prevent a nosebleed from recurring:

- Avoid forceful nose blowing.
- Avoid lifting or straining after a nosebleed to prevent a recurring nosebleed.
- Elevate your head while sleeping.
- Apply a light coating of a moisturizing ointment to the inside of your nose with the tip of your little finger.
- Do not use aspirin and other NSAIDs (such as ibuprofen or

naproxen sodium) for three to four days. Acetaminophen (such as Tylenol) may be used to relieve pain.

- Do not use nonprescription antihistamines, decongestants, and medicated nasal sprays.

Children with nosebleeds

Although nosebleeds in children can be alarming, they are not usually serious events. Toddlers and school-age children often have nosebleeds, but they usually stop during the teenage years. In addition to the common causes of nosebleeds mentioned above, they often run in families or occur for no apparent reason.

Remember to stay calm and speak in a quiet, relaxed manner so that you do not upset your child. If your child is crying, this can increase the blood flow to the face and make the bleeding worse. Make sure to check for an object in the nostrils. Toddlers often injure their nasal membranes by forcing objects into their nose. If you think that the possible cause of the nosebleed is dry or irritated nasal membranes, try a cold air humidifier in the child's room at night.

Call Kaiser Permanente if . . .

- the bleeding hasn't stopped after you have applied direct pressure for 30 minutes
- blood runs down the back of your throat even when the nose is pinched
- there is an obvious deformity in your nose after an injury
- you have nosebleeds often

Also call Kaiser Permanente if your child . . .

- is pale, sweaty, or not responding to you
- has lost a lot of blood
- is bleeding from the mouth, or vomiting blood or brown material that looks like coffee grounds
- has a nosebleed after a blow or injury to any part of the head

Other Resources

- Check your *Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook*.
- Listen to the Kaiser Permanente Healthphone at 1-800-33-ASK ME (1-800-332-7563). The TTY number for Healthphone is: 1-800-777-9059.
- Visit our Web site at www.kp.org.
- Contact your facility's Health Education Department for books, videos, classes, and additional resources.

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