

Nosebleed

What is a nosebleed?

A nosebleed is bleeding out of the front of your nose.

What is the cause?

The most common causes of nosebleed are:

- Irritation of the lining of the nose. This can be triggered by dry air or probing, bumping, picking, or rubbing your nose. Blowing your nose forcefully can also cause a nosebleed, especially if the nasal lining is already inflamed because of allergies or an infection, such as a sinus infection.
- Injury to the face or nose
- High altitude
- Drug abuse involving the nose, such as cocaine snorting or glue sniffing
- High blood pressure
- Medicine that makes it harder for your blood to clot
- Medical problems that prevent your blood from clotting normally, such as liver disease

Nosebleeds are common during pregnancy. Pregnant women have more blood flow to all mucous membranes in the body including the linings inside the nose.

Because of the increased blood flow inside the nose, the blood vessels can become fragile and bleed easily.

If you have a nosebleed after a head injury, it could mean you have a fractured skull. You should go to the hospital right away.

What are the symptoms?

The blood may flow from one or both nostrils. It may flow down your throat.

How is it diagnosed?

If you see your healthcare provider when you have a nosebleed, your healthcare provider will ask about your symptoms, medical history, and medicines you are taking and examine you. You may have blood tests.

How is it treated?

Most nosebleeds are minor and respond to first aid. If your nose is bleeding:

- Sit up and lean forward to keep blood from passing into your throat. Try not to swallow any blood. Blood in your throat could make you cough or choke.
- Pinch the soft part of your nose just below the nasal bones gently but firmly between your thumb and index finger and hold it for 5 to 10 minutes. Breathe through your mouth.

- After the bleeding stops, use a saline nasal spray or saline nose drops to keep the nose moist. Try not to blow your nose for several hours after the bleeding stops.

Usually a nosebleed stops after you have put pressure on it by pinching it. If a nosebleed lasts more than 20 minutes in spite of first aid, see your healthcare provider.

If you go to your healthcare provider with a nosebleed, it can be treated in different ways.

- Your provider may put a cotton ball soaked with medicine on the site of the bleeding for 5 to 10 minutes.
- If your nose is still bleeding, your provider may apply a cotton ball soaked in stronger medicine for 5 minutes to numb and temporarily reduce the blood supply to the nasal lining.
- Your healthcare provider may pack your nose with gauze coated with petroleum jelly or put a special balloon in your nose to put pressure on the bleeding blood vessel. Don't remove any packing yourself. Your provider must be the one to remove the packing to be sure the bleeding has stopped and does not start again when the packing is removed. Removing the packing yourself can start the bleeding again and be dangerous if the bleeding is heavy.
- Your healthcare provider might use a procedure called cauterization to make the blood clot at the bleeding site. After numbing the area inside the nose, your provider will use a swab to put silver nitrate on the area that is bleeding. Or your provider may apply a tiny amount of electricity on the bleeding area. This will help keep it from bleeding again.

Treatment may sometimes include staying at the hospital.

How can I take care of myself?

- Follow the treatment prescribed by your healthcare provider.
- Use a humidifier or vaporizer to add moisture to the air.
- Use a saline nose spray or drops.
- Check with your provider about any medicines you are using. For example, nosebleeds may be more severe or you may have them more often if you are taking aspirin.
- Don't use cocaine.
- Don't smoke.
- Avoid bending over, straining, lifting heavy objects, and exercising vigorously for a few days after a nosebleed.
- If you have heavy nosebleeds or more than 3 nosebleeds in a week, see your healthcare provider.

How can I help prevent a nosebleed?

Some causes of nosebleeds can be prevented as follows:

- To prevent dryness, keep the lining of your nose moist. Gently put a light coating of petroleum jelly inside your nose or use a saline nose spray twice a day.
- Avoid injuring the nasal lining with nose picking, rubbing, or forceful nose-blowing.
- Keep your home humidified.

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