

Nosebleeds

A nosebleed happens when one of the blood vessels in the lining of the nose bursts. Nosebleeds may be caused by infection, injury, allergic reaction, nose picking or an object being pushed into the nostril. Another name for nosebleed is epistaxis.

Bleeding from the nose is common in children and is usually not serious. Seek medical attention if nosebleeds are severe or frequent or prolonged.

Blood vessels in the nose are fragile

The small blood vessels in the septum (the firm tissue between the nostrils, which divides the nose into two halves) can burst fairly easily and this may cause your nose to bleed. The most common area for a nosebleed is near the front of the nose. Occasionally the bleeding comes from the back, near the throat.

In children, the nose tends to bleed from only one side (unilateral). Children usually grow out of the condition. If the bleeding is very heavy, or prolonged or does not stop with simple measures, take your child to a doctor or a hospital emergency department.

Signs and symptoms

The signs and symptoms of a nosebleed include:

- Bleeding from either or both nostrils
- A sensation of flowing liquid at the back of the throat
- The urge to swallow frequently.

A range of causes

A nosebleed can be caused by a range of factors, including:

- Fragile blood vessels that bleed easily, perhaps in warm dry air or after exercise
- An infection of the nose lining, sinuses or adenoids
- An allergy that causes hay fever or coughing
- Bumps or falls
- An object that has been pushed up the nostril
- Nose picking
- Rarely, a bleeding or clotting problem.

First aid management

To manage a nosebleed include:

- Reassure the person, especially children, as crying increases blood flow.
- Sit the person up straight and drop their head **forward**.
- Squeeze the nostrils together gently but firmly and hold for at least 10 minutes.
- Encourage the person to breathe through their mouth while their nostrils are pinched.
- Place a cold cloth or cold pack over the person's forehead and one around the neck especially around the sides of the neck.
- After 10 minutes, release the pressure on the nostrils and check to see if the bleeding has stopped.

- Tell the person not to sniff or blow their nose for at least 15 minutes and not to pick their nose for the rest of the day. (Having a nose full of clotted blood is unpleasant and children in particular may find it difficult to avoid sniffing or nose blowing for a few hours. Fifteen minutes will at least give some time for the clot to stabilise.)

Seek medical attention

You should go to the doctor or a hospital emergency department if the bleeding doesn't stop after simple first aid management. It is important to find and treat the cause of ongoing bleeding.

Frequent nosebleeds

If your child keeps having nosebleeds, see your doctor as the cause needs to be understood and treatment commenced. For example, if the cause is an ongoing infection, your doctor may prescribe an antibiotic ointment or medicine. Very occasionally, a child loses so much blood that this causes other health problems, such as anaemia.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Nurse-on-Call Tel. 1300 606 024 – for expert health information and advice (24 hours, 7 days)
- The nearest hospital emergency department

Things to remember

- Bleeding from the nose is common in children and is usually not a sign of any underlying problem.
- First aid treatment includes pinching the nostrils until the bleeding stops.
- If the nosebleed won't stop, see a doctor or go to a hospital emergency department.

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St John Ambulance

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