

## Epistaxis (Nosebleed)

### Prevention

Most nosebleeds occur in the anterior (front) of the *nasal septum*, which is the dividing wall between the two nostrils. Several arteries, veins, and capillaries coalesce at this region of the septum.

When the lining of the nose called “nasal mucosa” becomes dry due to environmental conditions such as being in a desert climate or being inside a structure with the heater or air conditioning running for extended periods of time, these blood vessels move closer to the surface and are more fragile. They can then begin to bleed more easily with even minor trauma such as blowing the nose or nose-picking.

This dryness is compounded by patients who are taking blood-thinning medications such as coumadin, aspirin, ibuprofen, and Plavix. Many over the counter supplements also thin the blood and lead to excessive bleeding. Consult your physician with specific questions about these substances.

To counteract this dryness, there are several moisturization techniques that can be employed:

- **Nasal saline:** This can be in the form of a spray or a gel. Nasal saline sprays such as Ocean, Sea Mist, etc can be used several times a day safely without risk of dependence. Nasal saline gels such as Ayr, can be applied carefully inside of each nostril at night before bedtime.
- **Cool mist humidifier:** Running a cool-mist humidifier by the bedside while sleeping can help to moisturize the air that is traveling into the nose.
- **Antibiotic ointment:** Apply Bacitracin, Neosporin, or even Vaseline to the outside of the nostrils before bedtime to humidify the air just before it enters the nose.

### Stopping an Active Nosebleed

Since most bleeding is originating from the anterior nasal septum, it is often fairly straightforward to control it:

- **Afrin (oxymetazoline)** – This is sold over the counter under many different brand names (Afrin, 4-way, Sinus Relief, etc), and can lead to dependence/addiction even within a *few days* of usage. It is, however, safe in the short-term to control bleeding. Oxymetazoline is a potent *vasoconstrictor*, which shrinks a bleeding vessel and stops it from any further oozing. After gently removing any clot that may have collected in the nose, apply several liberal squirts to the bleeding nostril. Repeat as needed.
- **Ice packs/Pressure** – The cold temperature of the ice will also result in vasoconstriction of the bleeding vessel. Since most nosebleeds occur at the anterior nasal septum, simply compress the bleeding nostril with an ice pack for 5-10 minutes at a time, removing it for 5-10 minutes. Do not leave the ice on any longer, as this may result in frostbite.

If you continue to have profuse bleeding after trying the above measures for 30 minutes or so, contact your physician or go directly to the nearest emergency room.

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