

Epistaxis

What is epistaxis

Epistaxis is the medical term for nose bleeds. The cause of the nose bleed may be obvious, but sometimes it can be difficult to see where the bleeding is actually coming from due to the normal structures inside the nose. The two nasal airways are separated by a partition of cartilage and bone covered by a mucous membrane (lining) which is known as the septum. In the majority of the population, the septum is rarely straight and therefore can make looking into the nose more difficult.

Does age make a difference?

In young people nose bleeds usually come from fragile 'surface' blood vessels on the nasal septum, inside near the tip of the nose. This is known as 'Little's' area. In older people, the bleeding often comes from further back and higher up in the nose. The bleeding may range from very small bleeds (just staining the handkerchief) to heavy bleeding requiring admission to hospital.

What can cause an epistaxis?

Some of the causes are as follows:

- Spontaneous - for no obvious reason.
- Injury to the nose (including nose picking).
- Hard nose blowing.
- Infections (such as the common cold).
- High blood pressure.
- Abnormalities of the blood clotting system.
- Anticoagulant therapy (such as warfarin or aspirin).

What does treatment/ management involve?

Minor nose bleeds can usually be dealt with simply by:

- Sitting upright with your head slightly tilted forward, with a bowl/container to put under your chin, and tissues to hand.
- Firmly squeeze between finger and thumb the soft part of the nose (just above the nostrils) for 10-20 minutes. If you have access to ice, put some ice in a plastic bag and apply over the nose whilst still squeezing. This makes the blood vessels constrict and form a clot which helps to stop the nose bleed.
- If you feel faint, lay down, preferably on your side. The nose often stops bleeding when you feel faint due to a reduction in the blood flow to peripheral (outer) areas of your body, e.g. the nose fingers, toes, etc.
- If bleeding does not settle/stop, call your GP or attend your nearest emergency department.

Patient with major nose bleeds follow the above instructions AND:

- Attend an emergency department, you may be admitted to hospital
- When in hospital you will be encouraged to have 'bed rest'.
- May require insertion of a dressing into the nose. This may stay in place for 24-48 hours; you will be reassessed on removal of the dressing.
- Occasionally you may be prescribed mild sedation (tablet).
- Patients rarely need an operation to stop the bleeding.

Potential Risks

- Blood loss causing anaemia.
- Potential of collapse due to blood loss.
- In severe cases the need for a blood transfusion.

Benefits

- To investigate the cause, treat and prevent further nose bleeds.
- To prevent anaemia through blood loss and treat as appropriate.

Things to avoid after an epistaxis

- Avoid drinking very hot drinks.
- Avoid alcohol for a few days after a nose bleed.
- Please try not to smoke.

- Do not blow your nose hard for a day or two, and then only gently.
- Do not pick your nose.
- Avoid hot steamy baths.
- Try not to do anything too strenuous for at least a week.

Here to help

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