

# First aid for nosebleeds

Don't fear the bleeder! Understand how it occurs and take the right steps to stop it.


A nose bleed may be a dramatic sight, but is not usually a serious matter. It happens when the membrane covering the blood vessels in the nose ruptures. This is because the nose has a rich supply of blood vessels, but the membrane covering it is thin and easily traumatised. When the membrane gives way, it exposes underlying blood vessels that can be torn. Nine in 10 cases of nosebleeds are due to a breakage of the thin anterior and capillary blood vessels, causing blood to ooze out slowly. If the bigger arterial vessels in the back of the nose are affected, the bleeding can be more profuse and harder to stop.

### Risk factors

Typically, the risk of bleeding is increased when there is a flu or nose infection, dry air, violent sneezing, rubbing of the nose, or a crooked nasal bone. Those who are pregnant, suffer hypertension and/or atherosclerosis (hardening of the blood vessels) and on blood thinning medications also tend to have a higher risk of nosebleeds. Rarely, this condition is associated with drug abuse, tumour and blood coagulation disorders,

so recurrent nosebleeds in adults should be investigated, especially if these occur with a headache, infections, neck lumps or ear blocks. Nosebleeds in babies are also a matter of concern if the bleeding is of large volume, rapid and not stopped by simple nose pressure, or the result of significant head trauma.

### In aggressive cases

Seek emergency treatment or advice from an ENT specialist for aggressive nosebleeds that do not stop or are due to trauma. In this scenario, an intravenous line may be used to hydrate the patient, while his or her vital signs will be continuously monitored. Pledgets (small wads of lint) may be soaked with medication that helps constrict the blood vessels and placed in the nose. A small bleeding vessel can also be cauterised with a silver nitrate stick or electrocautery. This involves a controlled 'burn' to seal the vessel. More aggressive nosebleeds will require the use of sponge-like material or gauze with a special nasal balloon, or even surgery to stop the bleed. The patient would need to be hospitalised and placed under observation. 



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## How to stop a nosebleed

- 1 Don't panic.
- 2 Sit down comfortably and tilt your head forward. Do not lie down or put your head lower than your body.
- 3 Do not dig, stuff tissue into your nose, blow your nose or sneeze with your mouth closed.
- 4 Press firmly on both sides of the nose with the tips of your thumb, index and middle fingers for at least 10 minutes. Breathe through your mouth. Repeat if bleeding recurs.
- 5 After the bleeding has stopped, lie down and rest with your head propped up. Avoid straining, carrying heavy things or physical exercises.
- 6 You may consider using saline or oxymetazoline nose drops, hemostatic gel, lubricating or antibiotic nasal ointment as prescribed by your doctor.

