

## DESCRIPTION

Sudden bleeding from one or both nostrils. The bleeding involves blood vessels (arteries and veins) in the nose. Nosebleeds may occur close to the nose opening or deeper in the nose. They can affect all ages, but are twice as common in children as in adults.

## FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Blood oozing from the nostril. If the broken vessel is close to the nostril, the blood is bright red. If the broken vessel is deeper in the nose, the blood may be bright or dark red.
- Lightheadedness from a large amount of blood loss (rare).
- Rapid heartbeat, shortness of breath, and pallor (with significant blood loss only).
- Black stool from swallowed blood.

## CAUSES

Injury to the nose, breathing dry air, allergies, illnesses, or for no apparent reason.

## RISK INCREASES WITH

- Injury to the nose.
- Nasal or sinus infection.
- A foreign body in the nose.
- Dry mucous membranes in the nose from any cause, such as low humidity.
- Bleeding tendencies associated with some illnesses.
- Allergic rhinitis (Hay fever) or nonallergic rhinitis.
- Use of certain drugs, such as anticoagulants, aspirin, or prolonged use of nose drops.
- Exposure to irritating chemicals.
- Excess alcohol use.
- High altitude or dry climate.

## EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Most nosebleeds are harmless, even though it seems like a lot of blood is lost. They are usually controlled with self-care by applying pressure to the nose.

## GENERAL MEASURES

Self-care:

- Sit up with your head bent forward.
- Clamp your nose closed with your fingers for 5 uninterrupted minutes. During this time, breathe through your mouth.
- If bleeding stops and recurs, repeat, but pinch your nose firmly on both sides for 8 to 10 minutes. Holding your nose tightly closed allows the blood to clot and seal the damaged blood vessels.
- You may apply cold compresses, or an ice pack, at the same time that you are applying pressure.
- Don't blow your nose for 12 hours after bleeding stops to avoid dislodging the blood clot.
- Don't swallow blood. It may upset your stomach or make you "gag," causing you to inhale blood.
- Don't talk (also to avoid gagging).
- Avoid aspirin if you have frequent nose bleeds.
- Use a humidifier if you live in a dry climate or at high altitude.

Medical care:

- Seek emergency treatment if self-care is not successful. Gauze packing may be inserted to absorb blood, stop the dripping, and exert pressure on the ruptured blood vessels. Continued or recurrent bleeding may require cauterization (use of heat to seal off blood vessels).
- Surgery (for severe bleeding only) to tie off the artery feeding the bleeding area.

## MEDICATIONS

Medications are not needed for a nosebleed. They may be prescribed to treat an underlying disorder.

## SEEK MEDICAL ATTENTION IF

- After the nosebleed, you become nauseous or vomit, or your temperature rises to 101°F (38.3°C) or higher.