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Epistaxis

Nosebleeds (epistaxis) can be very common. The lining or mucosa of the nasal tissue contains many blood vessels that may bleed easily. A common cause of nosebleeds is dry air. This dries the nasal membranes and makes the lining of the nose more susceptible to bleeding. Vigorous nose blowing and picking the nose can also cause nosebleeds.

Nosebleeds are classified into two different types.

Anterior nose bleed. Most nosebleeds begin in the lower part of the septum. Nose bleeds in children are almost always the anterior type.

Posterior nose bleed. Less commonly, a nosebleed may begin high and deep within the nose and flow down the back of the throat. Posterior nosebleeds are often more severe, requiring a physician's care. They tend to occur more in individuals with high blood pressure or after trauma to the nose or face.

Medical conditions that may contribute to nosebleeds are allergies, sinusitis, and a deviated septum. Blood thinners, such as coumadin (warfarin), heparin, and aspirin and aspirin-containing products can worsen nasal bleeding. Clotting disorders, fractures of the nose, and rarely, tumors have to be considered.

To stop an anterior nose bleed:

- 1) Help the patient or child stay calm. A person who is agitated may bleed more profusely than someone who's been reassured and supported. Move indoors where it is cool and comfortable. Anxiety and outdoor heat contribute to bleeding.
- 2) Pinch all the soft parts of the nose together between the thumb and the side of the index finger.
- 3) A cotton ball soaked in Afrin or neo-syneprine may be placed into the nostril.
- 4) Press firmly, but gently, the thumb and index finger toward the face, compressing the pinched parts of the nose against the bones of the face.
- 5) Hold the position for 5-10 minutes.
- 6) Head should be elevated, above the heart.
- 7) Ice can also be placed toward the nose and cheeks. Cold causes blood vessels to constrict thereby decreasing bleeding.

If you do experience additional bleeding, the following maneuver could help:

- Completely evacuate your nose of blood clots by blowing into a sink or Kleenexes and apply 3 to 4 sprays of topical decongestant such as Afrin to each nostril.
- Call the doctor if bleeding persists.

During periods of nosebleeds (epistaxis) there are several precautions you should employ for at least 2 weeks to allow healing of your nasal membranes:

- Avoid all vigorous activity. This includes jogging, lifting, yard work, aerobics, contact sports, or any activity that causes your pulse and blood pressure to increase.
- Avoid warm liquids, warm foods, or spicy foods. Heat causes blood vessels to dilate, thereby precipitating bleeding.
- Avoid hot showers and baths. Hot tubs and saunas are off limits.
- Avoid medicines that alter the ability of your blood to clot normally. This includes over the counter medicines such as aspirin, ibuprofen, Advil, Motrin, Anaprox, Naprosyn, Orudis, Nuprin, Ecotrin, and other non-steroidal anti-inflammatories. Tylenol (acetaminophen) products are acceptable.
- Do not blow your nose, as this may forcibly disrupt clots along your nasal membranes. Sneeze through an open mouth.
- Avoid all trauma to your nose.
- Smoking is discouraged.
- Try to use a humidifier in the room in which you sleep or work
- Keep your head elevated at night while sleeping. A lubricating ointment (bacitracin, A and D ointment, polysporin) may be placed along the septum several times each day and before bedtime.