

Patient information from BMJ

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Nosebleeds in children

Most children get nosebleeds from time to time. If your child gets them a lot, you may be worried that there's something wrong. Most likely, there isn't. Children usually grow out of nosebleeds by the time they are teenagers.

What are nosebleeds?

The blood vessels in a child's nose can bleed easily. Your child might get a nosebleed after tripping, being hit in the face during sport or play, or falling off a bike. If your child's nose bleeds after an injury, see a doctor straight away. The doctor will check whether your child has broken their nose, or if they have any other injuries that need treating.

Some children get nosebleeds a lot, especially if they pick their nose, get an object stuck in their nose, or have an infection. If you often use nasal drops or sprays to treat an allergy, such as hay fever, this may also cause nosebleeds. Some nosebleeds happen for no obvious reason.

Very rarely, nosebleeds are caused by a problem with the structure of a child's nose, or by a benign growth (a growth that isn't cancer). It's extremely unusual for nosebleeds to be a sign of a serious disease, such as cancer or a bleeding problem.

What treatments work?

Most nosebleeds can be easily treated at home with simple first aid. If you're worried that your child gets a lot of nosebleeds, you may want to take them to see a doctor. Your doctor will look for anything that may be causing the nosebleeds and talk about whether your child needs treatment to prevent them.

First aid you can do yourself

Nosebleeds are not usually difficult to stop. Stay calm and reassure your child. Sit them down and ask them to lean forward. Don't have your child lie down or hold their head back, because blood might drip down their throat and make them sick.

Gently squeeze, or get your child to squeeze, the soft part of their nose, near the nostrils. (Squeezing the bony part of their nose, nearer the top, won't help.) Keep squeezing for

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five minutes, then check whether the bleeding has stopped. If it hasn't stopped, squeeze for another 10 minutes. Don't put anything into your child's nose, such as tissues or cotton gauze.

Take your child to hospital or to see a doctor if the bleeding is heavy, it doesn't stop after 15 or 20 minutes, or it was caused by an accident.

Doctor treatment for a nosebleed that won't stop

If the nosebleed has not stopped by pressing on the nose, the doctor may use a spray that combines a local anaesthetic and a drug to narrow the blood vessels, or dab the mixture on with cotton. They will check whether there is any other cause for the bleeding, such as something stuck in the nose.

If this treatment does not stop the bleeding, the doctor may pack the nostril with cotton or sponge. Or they may seal off the blood vessels using a chemical called silver nitrate. This is called cauterisation. Both packing and cauterisation can be uncomfortable.

Preventing nosebleeds: things you can do yourself

Tell your child not to pick their nose, as this can cause bleeding. They should also avoid injury to their nose, for example from falling over or while playing sport.

Some people try coating the inside of the child's nostrils with petroleum jelly (Vaseline).

Preventing nosebleeds: things the doctor can do

Your doctor may suggest you use an antiseptic and antibiotic cream inside your child's nose.

They may also suggest cauterisation to seal off blood vessels to prevent future bleeding.

There is not much evidence to show how well either antiseptic creams or cauterisation work, or which is best.

What will happen?

Nosebleeds can be unpleasant, especially if they happen a lot. But they can usually be stopped easily. Most children stop having frequent nosebleeds by the time they're teenagers.

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