



Health Tips for Parents

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How to prevent and treat nosebleeds

Up to 60 percent of people experience at least one nosebleed at some point in their lives. Most cases occur in children 2 to 10 years old.

Source of nosebleeds

Most children report that they can sense the onset of a nosebleed before it occurs. Ninety percent of nosebleeds in children start from “Kiesselbach’s plexus,” an area near the front of the nose where all of the blood vessels of the nose meet.

“The membrane lining in this area of the nose is very thin,” explains Alisha West, MD, UCLA pediatric head and neck surgeon and director of the Pediatric Airway Center at UCLA. “When these small blood vessels break, blood begins to drip from one or both of the child’s nostrils.”

Common causes

One of the most common causes of nosebleeds is nasal dryness. When nasal membranes are dry, they’re more susceptible to irritation and rupture. “Children exposed to dry climates are therefore more prone to nosebleeds,” Dr. West says. “Allergies or nasal irritation caused by nose picking, blowing or rubbing can also lead to nosebleeds.”

Less frequently, nosebleeds can result from a sinus infection, use of intranasal steroids, a common cold, or foreign bodies in the nose, such as a toy or piece of food lodged in the nose.

Treatment

When your child experiences a nosebleed, tilt his or her head forward and apply pressure to the nostrils (not the nasal bones). Do not tilt your child’s head backward; this may cause blood to drain into the throat. It is also important not to panic. If your child becomes anxious, his or her blood pressure may rise, potentially worsening the nosebleed.

“To control the bleeding and promote clot formation, parents may also gently pack the nasal chambers with gauze or cotton balls,” Dr. West says.

If conservative treatments are unsuccessful, your pediatrician may recommend surgical interventions, such as a nasal cautery, depending on your child’s age.

Prevention tips

Dr. West recommends three methods (all available over-the-counter) to prevent nosebleeds:

1. Place a humidifier in your child’s room.
2. Use a salt-water nasal spray at least three times a day.
3. Apply antibiotic ointment to each nostril with a Q-tip every morning and night, focusing on the septum (about half an inch away from the tip of the nostril).

Perform all three actions for one month; if nosebleeds continue, schedule a pediatric visit for further evaluation.



When to call your pediatrician

If your child’s nosebleed does not stop after 15 minutes of applying appropriate pressure, call your child’s pediatrician or go to a local emergency department. Also consult your pediatrician if your child experiences nosebleeds three or more times a week. High-risk children with bleeding disorders or low platelets should also see their pediatricians immediately if the nosebleed does not stop within 10 minutes.