

Patient information from the BMJ Group

Nosebleeds in children

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Nosebleeds in children

Most children get nosebleeds from time to time. But if your child gets frequent nosebleeds, you may be worried that there's something wrong. Most likely, there isn't. Children usually grow out of nosebleeds by the time they're teenagers.

We've brought together the best research about frequent nosebleeds in children and weighed up the evidence about how to treat them. You can use our information to talk to your doctor and decide which treatments are best for your child.

What are frequent nosebleeds in children?

Frequent nosebleeds are very common in children. Most of the time, the cause of these nosebleeds is never known.



If your child has a nosebleed after falling, their nose may be broken. So you should make sure they see a doctor as soon as possible.

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Children often have a nosebleed because they injure themselves. They may get one, for example, if they fall over and hit their face during sport or rough play, or while riding a bike.

If your child's nose bleeds after a blow or injury, see a doctor straight away. The doctor will check whether the nose is broken and see if any other injuries need to be treated. ^[1]
^[2]

The advice here applies to **repeated nosebleeds that happen for no clear reason**.

Nosebleeds usually come from broken blood vessels inside the nose, near the nostrils. Repeated nosebleeds in children can be caused or made worse by:

- Picking the nose ^[1] ^[2] ^[3] ^[4]
- Having an object stuck in the nose ^[2] ^[4] This could just be a piece of dried mucus.
- Having an **infection** in the skin inside the nose ^[3]
- Using nasal drops or sprays too much to treat an allergy, such as **hay fever**. ^[4]

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). ^[3]

Frequent nosebleeds can be a sign of serious disease, but this is very rare. Diseases that affect the blood's ability to clot and some cancers can cause repeated nosebleeds in children, but this is extremely unusual. ^[3] If your doctor suspects a serious cause for the nosebleeds, he or she may order blood tests or refer your child to a specialist.

What are the symptoms of frequent nosebleeds in children?

Most children get nosebleeds from time to time. And you'll know the symptoms: bleeding from the nose, which stops after a few minutes.

It is more difficult to know if your child's nosebleeds are frequent. Unfortunately there is no agreed-on definition of what doctors mean by frequent nosebleeds.

You should know how to deal with a nosebleed when it happens, using simple first aid. For more, see [How to treat a nosebleed](#). There are also treatments to [prevent nosebleeds](#) if your child has them regularly.

When should I get medical help for my child's nosebleed?

Occasionally your child might need to see a doctor for immediate treatment of a nosebleed.

Seek medical help straight away if: ^[5] ^[6]

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- The bleeding does not stop after 15 or 20 minutes (your child may need further treatment from a doctor to stop the bleeding)
- The bleeding is unusually severe
- The bleeding was caused by an injury (the nose may be broken or there may be other injuries that are not easy to see but that need immediate treatment).

If you're worried about your child getting repeated nosebleeds, you may want to take him or her to see a doctor, especially if the nosebleeds are becoming more common. ^[6] The doctor will try to find the cause for the nosebleeds and talk to you about treatments that might help prevent them.

How common are frequent nosebleeds in children?

Nosebleeds are a common problem.

There haven't been many studies of how many children have nosebleeds.

About 1 in 10 children get frequent nosebleeds. ^[8]

What treatments work for frequent nosebleeds in children?

If your child gets frequent nosebleeds, there are things you can do.

Most nosebleeds stop after a while with simple [first aid](#) . But if your child gets frequent nosebleeds, you might want to try one of the following treatments.

Key points about treating nosebleeds in children

- A prescription [antiseptic](#) cream (called Naseptin) can help to reduce nosebleeds.
- Antiseptic cream works just as well as a treatment called cauterisation, which uses a chemical to seal off blood vessels in the nose.
- Putting petroleum jelly (Vaseline) in the nose might help to prevent nosebleeds, but we need more research to know whether this treatment works.
- It makes sense to discourage your child from picking his or her nose, as this can cause bleeding.
- You might also want to avoid treatments that you put up the nose to treat allergies (such as [hay fever](#)), as these can lead to nosebleeds.

Which treatments work best? We've looked at the research and given a rating for each treatment according to how well it works.

Treatment Group 1

Treatments for nosebleeds in children

Treatments that are likely to work

- [Antiseptic cream](#)

Treatments that need further study

- [Cauterisation](#)
- [Vaseline](#)

What will happen to my child?

Nosebleeds can be unpleasant and upsetting, but they are rarely serious.

Even frequent nosebleeds aren't usually caused by something seriously wrong.^[9] Most children grow out of having nosebleeds by the time they're teenagers.

Most nosebleeds can be stopped at home with [first aid](#) .

If your child's nosebleed cannot be stopped with simple first aid at home, the bleeding can probably be stopped with treatment from your GP or the hospital accident and emergency department.

Treatment might involve packing the nose with gauze. The doctor might also cauterise your child's nose to stop the bleeding. This involves placing a spot of a chemical called silver nitrate over the bleeding area, using a small stick. This seals the blood vessel where the blood is coming from, much like welding seals a leaking pipe. This can be painful but the area can be numbed first with a [local anaesthetic](#) .^[10]

If your child's nosebleeds are frequent, there are treatments that may help prevent them. See [What treatments work for frequent nosebleeds in children?](#)

Treatments:

Antiseptic cream

In this section

Applying an antiseptic cream to your child's nose may help to reduce the number of nosebleeds.^[7] The cream that is usually prescribed is a combination of chlorhexidine (an antiseptic) and neomycin (an [antibiotic](#)). The brand name is Naseptin.

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In one study, children who used this cream were nearly twice as likely not to have nosebleeds for one month as children who did not use the cream.^[7] In another study, about 1 in 2 children who used the cream had fewer nosebleeds.^{[7] [11]}

The cream worked just as well as sealing off the blood vessels in the nose with silver nitrate (a treatment called cauterisation). Using both of these treatments together might be slightly better than antiseptic cream on its own.^[7]

Some children don't like the smell of the cream or the taste of it as it drips down the back of their throat from their nose.^[7]

Naseptin is not suitable for children with an allergy to peanuts, because it contains peanut oil. Children who are allergic to peanuts may be able to use another cream that contains an antibiotic called mupirocin. The brand name is Bactroban. We haven't looked at the research on Bactroban, so we don't know how well it works to reduce how many nosebleeds children get.

Cauterisation

In this section

Cauterisation may help to reduce nosebleeds in children, but there's very little research to show how well it works.^[7]

Cauterisation is a way of sealing off the blood vessels in the nose. It involves placing a spot of a chemical called silver nitrate over the bleeding area, using a small stick.

One small study found that cauterisation with silver nitrate worked as well as applying an antiseptic cream to the nose. Cauterisation reduced the number of nosebleeds in one month for about 1 in 2 children who had it. Combining both of these treatments might give the best result.^[7]

All of the children found the procedure painful, even though their nose was numbed first with a painkiller (a [local anaesthetic](#)).^[7]

Cauterisation with silver nitrate can sometimes damage the rigid tissue that separates the nostrils (this is called the nasal septum).^[7]

Vaseline

In this section

Putting a light coating of petroleum jelly (Vaseline) inside the nose may help to prevent nosebleeds. This treatment is often recommended, but little research has been done on it.

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One study with 105 children tested Vaseline for one month and found that it did not reduce their chances of having a nosebleed.^[7] We need more research to know whether petroleum jelly is helpful for children with nosebleeds.

Further informations:

How to treat a nosebleed

You'll probably be able to stop your child's nosebleed at home with simple first aid.

Usually nosebleeds in children come from blood vessels inside the nose, near the nostrils, and they are not difficult to stop.^[7] Try the following:^[5] ^[6]

- Stay calm and reassure your child
- Sit your child down and ask him or her to lean forwards. Don't have your child lie down, because blood might drip down the throat and make your child feel sick
- Gently squeeze the soft part of your child's nose, near the nostrils. Because the bleeding is most likely to be coming from the front part of the nose, this is the best place to apply pressure to stop it. Do not squeeze the bony part of the nose, nearer the top
- Keep squeezing for five minutes and then check whether the bleeding has stopped
- If it hasn't stopped after five minutes, squeeze again for another 10 minutes.

Do not put anything into the nose, such as tissues or cotton gauze.

Glossary:

infection

You get an infection when bacteria, a fungus, or a virus get into a part of your body where it shouldn't be. For example, an infection in your nose and airways causes the common cold. An infection in your skin can cause rashes such as athlete's foot. The organisms that cause infections are so tiny that you can't see them without a microscope.

hay fever

You get hay fever when your immune system reacts too strongly to pollen or mould. Your doctor may call it seasonal allergic rhinitis. The most common symptoms are sneezing, a runny or blocked nose, and red, itchy eyes. You may also cough or wheeze.

local anaesthetic

A local anaesthetic is a painkiller that's used to numb one part of your body. You usually get local anaesthetics as injections.

antiseptic

An antiseptic is a substance used to kill harmful germs on your skin.

antibiotics

These medicines are used to help your immune system fight infection. There are a number of different types of antibiotics that work in different ways to get rid of bacteria, parasites, and other infectious agents. Antibiotics do not work against viruses.

Sources for the information on this leaflet:

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