Nosebleeds (Epistaxis) Instruction Sheet

What causes nosebleeds?

There are multiple causes for nasal bleeding. Often the cause is harmless, but your physician will make sure that other causes (such as a tumor, septal perforation, or septal deviation) are not responsible.

Nosebleeds usually start just inside the entrance of the nostril, on the nasal septum (which divides the nasal cavity into two). At this site, the blood vessels are quite fragile and can rupture easily for no apparent reason. Bleeding can also occur further back in the nose. In most cases there is no specific cause for the bleed but rarely, nosebleeds can indicate an underlying problem.

Medications may make bleeding worse. Aspirin and warfarin (Coumadin) decrease the ability of your blood to clot, causing bleeding to be worse. Other herbal medications such as ginseng, ginko, and garlic can also make clotting more difficult.

Uncontrolled high blood pressure can also increase epistaxis problems.

Nosebleeds are more likely to occur:

- If you pick your nose
- If you have a cold or blocked stuffy nose from allergies or sinusitis
- When you blow your nose

In most cases, the bleeding tends to last only a short time and is usually easy to control.
How do I stop a nosebleed?

The following may help to stop the nosebleed:

1. Sitting forward with the mouth open and spit out any blood — try not to swallow blood as it will irritate the stomach and make you feel sick.

2. Spray Afrin (oxymetazoline) into nose on affected side. Pinch hard the fleshy/flexible part of the nose. Hold for at least 5 minutes before rechecking the nose. Packing the nose with tissue usually does not apply enough pressure. The Afrin spray will medically squeeze blood vessels tight.

3. Apply an ice pack over the bony bridge part of the nose (a pack of frozen peas may be used) and suck an ice cube. The cold helps the blood vessels to constrict (become narrow) and stop bleeding.

4. Try to remain calm and rest quietly.

5. If after 20 minutes it has not stopped seek medical help.

Having stopped the nosebleed, try to avoid:

1. Blowing the nose (for up to one week).

2. Sneezing through your nose — keep your mouth open.

3. Heavy lifting, straining or bending over, or vigorous activity.

4. Picking the nose — you can put the tip of a tube of antiseptic cream up your nostril.

5. Sleep propped up for the first night.

6. Keep the nose moist. Use Vaseline at the entrance twice a day, nasal saline spray 4-5 time a day, and consider a bedside humidifier.
Recurring nosebleeds

Some people suffer from recurring nosebleeds. They may not be heavy, but they can become distressing. In this situation you may be referred to the Ear, Nose and Throat department. It is possible to cauterize (‘seal’) the bleeding point using an endoscope. This is a minor procedure which is usually successful in stopping recurrent bleeds.