

THE "INFO"-HALER



TAKE IN THE INFORMATION

An easy to understand, informative newsletter for our patients of all ages from the Allergy & Asthma Associates of Michigan, P. C.

NASAL SPRAYS IN ALLERGENIC DISEASE

The nose is the body's natural air filtration process. It works to filter out viruses, bacteria, dust, dirt, and allergens as well as to humidify and moisten dry air and to warm excessively cold air that may otherwise damage the lungs. Humans inhale through their nose approximately 17,000 times per day, moving two gallons of air per minute, and producing between a pint and a gallon of mucus per day. When the mucus membranes become inflamed (rhinitis: excessive mucus is produced causing a stuffy, runny, or drippy nose, sneezing, scratchy throat, and dry cough. Nasal sprays are excellent medications to control these symptoms, since they deliver the medication directly to the target site: the nose, and not to other parts of the body. Since the sprays are site specific and the medication does not have to travel throughout the body, lower doses of medications are needed and there are fewer side effects. Generally nose sprays are faster acting than systemic medications, and can be used by children as well as adults.

There are five groups of nasal sprays available for treatment. The first group is the decongestant nasal sprays which work to constrict swollen blood vessels in the nose and reduce nasal and sinus congestion. Examples of these sprays are Afrin and Neo-Synephrine. These sprays are capable of producing dangerous rebound congestion after only a few days of continuous use, therefore, must be taken with great caution and only as directed. The second group of nasal sprays is the antihistamine nasal sprays (Astelin). Antihistamines are used to block the effects of histamine, which is released during an allergic reaction, and to help relieve symptoms such as sneezing, itchy nose, and runny nose. The third group of nasal sprays is the Cromolyn Sodium nasal sprays (Nasal crom). This group has anti-inflammatory properties in that it works to stabilize the mast cells and prevent histamine release in the nose. The fourth group of nasal sprays is the anti-cholinergic nasal sprays (Atrovent). This group acts directly on the secretory glands of the nose and works to decrease the production of nasal secretions. The fifth group of nasal sprays is the corticosteroid nasal sprays. Examples of these sprays are Beconase, Vancenase, Flonase, Nasonex, Nasacort, Nasalide, Rhinocort, and Nasarel. These sprays reduce inflammation in the nose and are the single most effective controller medications for the treatment of allergic rhinitis. They begin to work within twelve hours, but do not reach full effectiveness until after a week of use. For maximum control of seasonal allergies, these sprays should be started one to two weeks before the beginning of allergy season and used throughout the season.

Nasal sprays must be used correctly for maximum benefit. It is important to follow the package insert instructions carefully. The correct technique for the use of most nasal sprays is as follows:

1. Blow your nose.
2. Remove the cap and shake the spray pump unit.
3. Prime the pump (when necessary) by actuating the pump spray until a fine mist is produced.
4. Stand up straight and look at your toes.
5. Exhale, and then block one nostril with your finger.
6. Insert the spray bottle just inside the open nostril pointing the tip straight back into the nose (never toward the nasal septum in the center of the nose).
7. Actuate the pump spray and gently sniff in the medication (avoid inhaling vigorously as the medication will run down the back of your throat rather than finely misting the nasal mucosa).
8. Repeat above steps with the other nostril.

9. Be sure to know the number of actuations available in your pump, then count down after each use, to prevent running out of medication.
10. Carefully follow the care and cleaning instructions in the package insert.

The most common side effects of nasal spray are headache, bloody nose, dry nose, cough, and pharyngitis. Drinking lots of water (eight glasses per day) and using over the counter salt water nose sprays (Ocean) prior to the steroid sprays, will help prevent most problems.

Nasal lavage (wash) is a great way to clean excessive mucus, allergens, and irritants from the nose and decrease nasal swelling. When the nose is clean, breathing is easier, fewer symptoms are present, and medication inhalation is more effective. The nose can be washed with a homemade preparation of $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. non-iodized salt, 8 oz. warm water, and a pinch of baking soda, or commercial preparations are available for purchase. There are four basic methods to wash the nose. For each method you should stand comfortably over the sink, and leave your mouth and opposite nostril open to allow irrigation fluid to run out freely. Never swallow the solution.

The first method of nasal lavage consists of pouring the above mixture into your hand, or a shallow bowl, and inhaling by sniffing the solution into your nose one nostril at a time. When done, gently blow your nose. The second method of nasal lavage consists of filling an earwash bulb syringe with the above mixture, inserting the tip of the syringe inside one nostril, then pinching the nostril around the syringe. Gently squeeze the syringe and allow the solution to irrigate the nostril. Repeat with the opposite nostril. When done, gently blow your nose. The third method of nasal lavage is to use a sinus rinse kit with a squeeze bottle. Squeeze the above mixture into one nostril, then the other. When done, gently blow your nose. The fourth method of nasal lavage consists of using a water pik with a Grossan nasal irrigation tip. Pour the above mixture into the water reservoir, and set the water pik to the lowest pressure. Insert the tip of the irrigator just inside one nostril, then, as always; allow the solution to run out the other nostril and your mouth. Repeat on the other side. When done, gently blow your nose.

After nasal lavage, be sure to wash all equipment thoroughly in warm, soapy water and allow to air dry. Nasal lavage can be done one to two times per day. Alternative, less invasive, measures consist of long, hot showers, facial saunas, or cold steam vaporizing.

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