

Nasal Polyps

What are nasal polyps?

Nasal polyps are localised areas of swollen nasal mucosa containing excess fluid. Typically, nasal polyps affect both nasal cavities.

What causes nasal polyps?

The exact cause is unknown.

Are certain conditions associated with nasal polyps?

Yes. These include asthma and hay fever. Other conditions include cystic fibrosis (in younger patients) and fungal disorders. Nasal polyps affecting just one nasal cavity may indicate a more serious problem (eg. inverting papilloma)

What about Samter's Triad?

This syndrome consists of nasal polyps, asthma and aspirin sensitivity (worsening of one's asthma). This condition is harder to treat than regular nasal polyps.

What are the effects of nasal polyps?

Nasal polyps may cause a blocked nose. If severe enough they may block the sinuses and cause sinusitis. Other problems include drainage and a reduced capacity to smell. In some patients they cause no problems.

How do you assess my problem?

A history and examination is performed. An endoscope may be used to help view the polyps and surrounding tissue. X-rays (CT scans) and a blood test may also be required. Rarely, a biopsy is required.

How do you treat nasal polyps?

This will depend upon the cause. Nasal steroid sprays are used to reduce the inflammation. Prednisolone, a strong anti-inflammatory medication, may also be used initially. Other medications and avoidance of allergens may be warranted.

What are the potential side effects of prednisolone?

These include nausea, vomiting, dyspepsia, appetite changes, fluid retention and insomnia. Less common, but more serious side effects, include mood swings, elevation of blood pressure and unmasking of a tendency towards high blood sugar levels. If you are a diabetic your sugar levels and diabetic medications will need to be closely supervised. A very rare side effect is loss of blood supply to the top of the hip bone (avascular necrosis of the hip). Oral corticosteroids are not advised if you are pregnant or breastfeeding.

What about surgery?

If medical management is unsuccessful, surgery may be required. Surgery removes the polyps but does not deal with the underlying mucosal abnormality. Surgery also has risks.

Will the nasal polyps come back?

Unfortunately, with time, nasal polyps have a tendency to return. This may require further medical management and/or surgery.

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