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Nasal Polyps

If you have constant symptoms of nasal stuffiness, runny nose, sneezing, reduced sense of smell and taste, it could signify the presence of nasal polyps and not just allergies.

Nasal polyps are grape-like structures that develop as protrusions of the lining of the nose or from the lining of the sinuses and project into the nose through sinus openings. They can occur at any age, in children or adults, but most appear after the age of 40. Men outnumber women by two to one in occurrence of this condition.

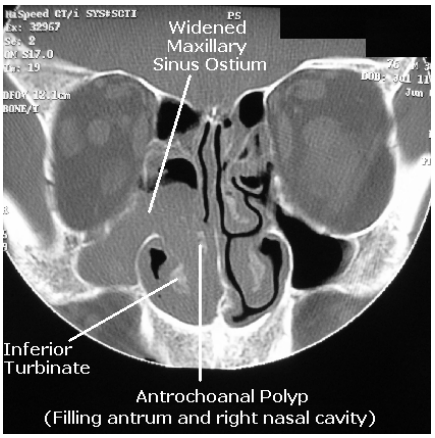
The cause of nasal polyps remains unknown. However, there are several speculations. The two most frequently considered include allergic disease and infection.

There is a high association of nasal polyps in those who have asthma and in those who are allergic to aspirin. The frequency of asthma in people with nasal polyps has been reported to be around 20%. Besides the year-round symptoms of nasal stuffiness, runny nose, sneezing and post nasal drip, people with polyps often have a decreased sense of smell and taste. They also may have symptoms of an associated sinus infection, such as discolored nasal mucous, post nasal drip, bad breath, cough and/or facial pain. Symptoms often can be worsened by exposure to environmental irritants, such as fumes, odors, dust, chemicals and temperature changes. A major complication of nasal polyps is chronic sinusitis. Presence of nasal polyps predisposes to development of sinus infections and these in turn, worsen the nasal polyps. This makes it a vicious cycle.

Conversely, several studies have cast doubts on the importance of allergy as a cause of polyps. One study found the frequency of nasal polyps to be lower in the allergic population. Another study found no greater frequency of allergy among people with nasal polyps than in the general population. Studies will likely continue to be conducted to obtain additional information about nasal polyps.

Nasal polyps are diagnosed by getting a good history from the patient and by examination of the nostrils carefully. However, small nasal polyps higher up in the nose may not be visible on examination. If there is a high degree of suspicion, your doctor may refer you to an ear, nose and throat specialist or order CT scan of the sinuses for further evaluation. Nasal polyps are unusual in children. It is often associated with cystic fibrosis. Sweat test will help identify this condition. Sometimes the nasal mucosa gets so much swollen and pale it may resemble nasal polyps. It is called nasal polypoid change. Regular use of intranasal corticosteroid nasal sprays will shrink the

swelling and bring normality to the nasal mucosa.



Nasal polyps are treated both medically and surgically. Intranasal corticosteroid nasal sprays are the mainstay of treatment for nasal polyps . At times, a short course of oral corticosteroids may be used to help reduce the size of the nasal polyps, and then continuous use of a corticosteroid nasal spray helps to prevent it from becoming enlarged. In fact, nasal polyps recur about 50% of the time following surgery. Regular use of prescription nasal sprays twice daily will help reduce this recurrence.

When there is an associated sinus infection, it is important that your physician prescribe an appropriate antibiotic to treat the infection. In cases of associated allergic rhinitis, allergy injections may be helpful, but the treatment does not affect the existing nasal polyp. Surgery is reserved for those cases in which the polyps are unresponsive to medical management or if there is concern about the potential side effects of the medications.

Taking medications such as aspirin and NSAIDs may aggravate nasal polyps in some patients. Ask your doctor about this next time you see him or her. It may become necessary to stop these medications.