

### **Nasal Sprays**

Nasal sprays are used in the treatment of nasal allergy symptoms. Because they are directly used in the nostrils, they are more effective than allergy pills in controlling the symptoms. However they take 3-7 days to work effectively. Therefore regular use and correct technique are important in achieving maximum benefit. They are especially useful in patients who have nasal obstructive symptoms, stuffiness and congestion of the nostrils and in some patients with snoring. They may even benefit patients suffering from sleep apnea and improve their quality of sleep when used in conjunction with other measures. Studies have shown that regular use of prescription nasal sprays reduces emergency room visits for acute asthma exacerbations in adults with asthma and nasal allergy symptoms.

There are several types of nasal sprays. Some contain steroids and others contain medications such as antihistamines and drying agents. Unlike prescribed nasal sprays, over-the-counter nasal sprays contain stimulant medications and have addiction potential. They also can make the existing nasal symptoms worse if used continuously for more than 4 days. Therefore, we do not recommend using over-the-counter nasal sprays for long periods of time. On the other hand prescription nasal sprays are safe to use when used appropriately. The prescription nasal sprays should be used daily as prescribed following the right technique. Otherwise you may not derive much benefit from using them.

The nasal sprays have excellent safety potential. Less than 1% of the medicine is absorbed from the nose into blood with some prescription nasal sprays. Growth studies in children have shown no impairment of growth from using intranasal corticosteroid containing nasal sprays daily for a year. They also do not cause significant systemic side effects such as adrenal suppression when used correctly. In one large study done in England, there was no difference in the incidence of cataracts in patients using and not using nasal sprays.

The prescription nasal sprays can cause headaches, dryness of the nostrils, sore throat and sometimes nosebleeds. Nosebleeds are often related to poor technique. Very rarely they can cause perforation of the nasal septum. However the nasal septum perforation does not occur suddenly and usually significant and persistent nosebleeds precede perforation of the nasal septum for many days or weeks. Therefore if you experience significant and persistent nosebleeds, stop using the nasal sprays and inform your physician.

The following technique is used in administering nasal sprays:

1. Shake the nasal spray bottle well before using it every time.
2. Lower your head slightly and look at the floor.
3. Introduce the nozzle about 1 cm into the right nostril and tilt the bottle in such a way that the nozzle is facing the right ear.
4. With the thumb supporting the bottom of the bottle, keeping the index and middle fingers on either side of the nozzle, do a quick downward compression of the nozzle.

5. It is not necessary to sniff after spraying the nose. Sniffing will take the medicine to throat where it is not needed and where it may produce unpleasant taste.
6. Repeat the procedure one more time in the right nostril.
7. In the left nostril the same procedure is followed twice but this time the nozzle should be facing the left ear.
8. If necessary, the nostrils can be compressed between index finger and thumb for few seconds after spraying to prevent the medication from dripping out.

Initially you can start by using two sprays in each nostril once or twice daily following your doctor's recommendations. As your symptoms get better over the next few weeks, you can use one spray each nostril once daily.

Keep your nasal sprays handy [but out of reach of small children] so that you do not forget to use them daily. Be sure to call your doctor in time for prescription refills.