

Cauterization of Nosebleeds

WHAT IS CAUTERIZATION FOR NOSE BLEED?

This is a procedure to stop persistent bleeding from a small vein or artery, usually in the front of the nose. An electrocautery needle or silver nitrate (a caustic agent), when applied to the bleeding point, burns the tissue slightly to seal the blood vessel. Cauterization takes only a few minutes and is performed in the doctor's office or outpatient department under local anesthesia. An uncooperative child may be admitted to the same day surgery facility for cauterization if sedation or a general anesthetic is required.

WHY IS IT PERFORMED?

The nose is endowed with a rich blood supply. This helps to warm and humidify inhaled air on its way to the lungs. Children and young adults in particular are prone to spontaneous nose bleeds (epistaxis), most commonly from a single vein in the septum (partition wall) in the front of the nostril. At examination, an engorged vein is often visible. Nose bleeds result from infection, drying of the nose lining, trauma -- especially nose picking. Blowing and sneezing because of a cold or allergic reaction, heavy coughing, and even vigorous exercise can cause epistaxis. If bleeding persists, cauterization may be required.

THE PROCEDURE

There is no special preparation for cauterization. The doctor examines each nostril with the light from a head mirror and a speculum, to look for the bleeding point and any other possible causes of bleeding. Blood may be taken to test for anemia or any clotting disorder. A roll of cotton impregnated with a local anesthetic agent is packed into the nostril. When the anesthetic has taken effect, the cotton roll is removed. The tissues surrounding the bleeding point, and then the vessel itself, are lightly touched with the silver nitrate stick or electrocautery needle. After a few minutes, you will be able to go home. No further treatment is necessary, but you must avoid any disturbance of the cauterized vein for about a week. You must not blow your nose, and, if you have to sneeze, try to keep your mouth open. Avoid strenuous work or heavy lifting; do not take aspirin or alcohol and do not smoke. You may be given lubricating nose drops to use while the nasal tissues heal. It may help to use a vaporizer at night until the feeling of congestion passes.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

There may be slight seepage or spot bleeding at first, but this should stop. If bleeding recurs, the vein will be recauterized after the tissues have healed.