

# Handling recurrent nose bleeding

Ever since she was a child, Sarah Birungi, 15, has had a problem of nose bleeding.

She says the problem mostly happens during dry season when it is very hot. Sometimes, she bleeds at night.

"I sometimes bleed for about five minutes. My parents took me for check-ups, tests were done, but I was not diagnosed with any illness. I now try to avoid being under the sun for a long time," she said.

Dr Johnson Richard Kubuzigu, a medical officer at Kasanda Health Centre IV in Mubende district said bleeding from the nose, which is also known as epistaxis, is a common complaint, which can occur spontaneously when the nasal membranes dry out, crust, and crack.

This is usually common in dry climates or during winter, when the air is dry and warm. However, there are also increased nosebleeds in association with older age.

He explains that most nose bleeds are spontaneous, but some can be recurrent. The cause of epistaxis is not always readily identifiable. Approximately 10% of patients with the condition have no identifiable causes even after a thorough evaluation.

## Avoiding nose bleeds

Dr. Kubuzigu explains that to prevent re-bleeding, do not pick or blow your nose and do not bend down for several hours after the bleeding episode.

During this time, keep your head higher than the level of your heart. You can also gently apply petroleum jelly to the inside of your nose using a cotton swab or your finger.

If re-bleeding occurs, blow your nose out forcefully to clear it of blood clots. Then spray both sides of your nose with a decongestant nasal spray containing oxymetazoline (Afrin).

## Seeking emergency care

Dr. Kubuzigu explains that bleeding that is recurrent is a medical emergency and requires urgent medical attention.

If the bleeding lasts for more than 30 minutes, when you feel faint or dizzy. This could be when the bleeding follows an accident, a fall or an

## CAUSES

- Nasal tumours
- Bleeding disorders such as haemophilia, recurrent upper respiratory tract infections, hypertension (high blood pressure)
- Drug-induced causes such as patients on warfarin, blood thinners and blood vessel abnormalities
- Medical conditions such as syphilis, TB which are not attended to and cause blood vessel damage or disorganise the clotting cascade/ pathways
- Diseases like viral haemorrhagic fever (Ebola, Congo Crimean fever), liver diseases such as hepatitis, congenital or acquired nasal abnormalities
- Environmental/ climatic changes such as dry or very cold weather
- Surgical conditions such as fracturing base of the skull following head injury

injury to your head, including a punch in the face that may have broken your nose.

## When to see doctor

Kubuzigu says when one experiences frequent nosebleeds, he or she may need a blood vessel cauterised. Cautery is a technique in which the blood vessel is burned with an electric current, silver nitrate or a laser.

He explains that the doctor may pack the patient's nose with special gauze or an inflatable latex balloon to put pressure on the blood vessel and stop the bleeding.

When one is experiencing nasal bleeding and taking blood thinners, such as aspirin or warfarin (Coumadin, Jantoven), a doctor may advise them to adjust one's dosage.

Using supplemental oxygen administered with a nasal tube (cannula) may increase your risk of nosebleeds. Apply a water-based lubricant to your nostrils and increase the humidity in your home to help relieve nasal bleeding.

Compiled by Vivian Agaba

Recurrent bleeding needs urgent medical attention