Nasal polyps

What are nasal polyps

Nasal polyps are soft, usually painless swellings of the lining of the nose or sinuses. Typical inflammatory polyps are benign and often affect both sides. A one-sided lump or persistent one-sided symptoms need specialist assessment.

Symptoms of nasal polyps

- Blocked or stuffy nose.
- Runny nose.
- Postnasal drip (mucus running down the back of your throat).
- Reduced or lost sense of smell and taste.
- Snoring.
- Facial pressure or headaches.
- Frequent sinus infections.

What causes nasal polyps

The exact cause isn't always known, but they are linked to chronic inflammation in the nasal passages. Common associated conditions include:

- Asthma.
- Chronic sinusitis.
- Allergic rhinitis may coexist, but polyps are not simply an allergic reaction.
- Aspirin sensitivity.
- Cystic fibrosis.

Diagnosis

Nasal polyps are usually diagnosed by a healthcare professional during a physical examination. They may use a small camera called a nasal endoscope to look inside your nose. Sometimes, imaging tests such as a CT scan may be needed.

Treatment options

Nasal sprays

- Steroid nasal sprays (e.g. mometasone, fluticasone) can shrink the polyps and reduce inflammation.

Tablets

- A short course of steroid tablets (e.g. prednisolone) may be prescribed if sprays aren't enough.

Surgery

- If symptoms are severe or persistent, surgery (endoscopic sinus surgery) may be needed to remove the polyps.
- Surgery can improve symptoms, but polyps can come back, so ongoing treatment is often necessary.

Self-care and prevention

- Saline rinses may help. Use sterile or distilled water, or water that has been boiled and allowed to cool, for nasal rinses. Follow the product instructions and clean the rinse device after use.
- Avoid known allergens and irritants.

- Manage associated conditions like asthma or allergies effectively.
- Follow your prescribed treatment plan and attend follow-up appointments.

When to seek medical advice

Arrange a review if treatment is not helping or symptoms are getting worse. Seek prompt assessment for persistent one-sided blockage, blood-stained discharge or a one-sided growth.

Seek urgent hospital assessment for swelling around an eye, double vision, reduced vision or a severe headache with fever or neck stiffness.

About this information

This leaflet explains the condition and common treatment choices. Your care team will advise what is suitable for you. If you have an operation, follow the specific preparation and aftercare instructions provided by your hospital.

Further information

NHS nasal polyps