

A Guide to Nasal Polyps

Nasal polyps are also known as chronic rhinosinusitis with nasal polyps (CRSwNP) and nasal polyp syndrome.



Nasal polyps are soft tissue growths on the lining inside the nose and sinuses. They can make it difficult to breathe. They can also reduce your sense of smell. Here are the key things to know about nasal polyps:

Symptoms: The symptoms of nasal polyps can be like other respiratory conditions. Symptoms can worsen during allergy season. Common symptoms of nasal polyps may include:

- Runny nose
- Stuffy nose (congestion), fullness, blockage within the nose (most common symptom)
- Trouble breathing through the nose
- Postnasal drip (sometimes causing cough and throat irritation)
- Loss of or decreased sense of smell and taste
- Headaches
- Pressure or pain on your face or in your sinuses
- Pain in your upper teeth
- Snoring, trouble sleeping, breathing through your mouth at night

Diagnosis: A doctor will ask you questions about your health and symptoms. They will look inside your nose. They may use a small scope with a camera to see inside your nose. They may also take a biopsy of the growth. Other tests they may do include blood tests, allergy tests, or imaging scans (CT or MRI).

Risk factors: There is a higher chance of developing nasal polyps if you have:

- Asthma, allergies, or allergic rhinitis
- Chronic sinus infections
- Past nasal injury or surgery
- Long-term exposure to air pollution or allergy triggers
- Aspirin-exacerbated respiratory disease (AERD)
- Family history of nasal polyps

Treatment: Corticosteroid nasal sprays or pills can treat small polyps. These medicines reduce swelling and can shrink or remove the polyps. Biologics are treatments that target a cell or protein to prevent swelling in the airways. They are not steroids. Your doctor may prescribe biologic treatment if other medicines aren't working. These are shots or infusions you get every 1-4 weeks. For severe cases, surgery may be needed. Surgery to remove nasal polyps most often happens on an outpatient basis. This means you don't have to stay in the hospital to recover.

Follow-up care: It is important to attend all follow-up appointments and to call your doctor if you have any problems.

Prevention: Allergy medicines can help prevent polyps from growing back. Use a saline (salt water) nose rinse to remove irritants and allergens from your nose. Doing a nose rinse before using a medicine spray can also help the medicine reach the tissue. Reduce your exposure to irritants and allergy triggers as much as possible. If the air in your home is dry, use a humidifier to keep the relative humidity levels in your home between 30-50%. (Do not let humidity get above 50% because that can increase mold and dust mites.)

Complications: There are several health problems that can occur when you have nasal polyps:

- Loss of smell or taste may not improve after treatment.
- Nasal polyps can lead to or worsen sleep apnea.
- They can also cause frequent sinus infections.
- Asthma attacks can worsen in people who have asthma and nasal polyps.
- Untreated nasal polyps can lead to bone and tissue damage.
- Rare infections can spread to the ears, face bones, sinuses, or bloodstream.
- Polyps can come back after treatment.



Support: You may need a team of doctors to help you manage and treat your nasal polyps and related conditions. This may include your primary care provider, allergist, sinus surgeon, sleep specialist, or ear, nose, throat specialist. It may help to bring someone you trust with you to your appointments to help you with taking notes and asking questions.

People with nasal polyps may experience sleep disturbance, anxiety, and depression. If you are feeling effects on your mental health, talk with your primary care provider. Ask for a referral to a mental health provider who specializes in supporting people with chronic (long-term) diseases.

The Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America hosts an online support group for people with asthma, allergies, eczema, nasal polyps, and other related conditions. Find support at aafa.org/join or call 1-800-7-ASTHMA (1-800-727-8462).