

# Nasal Allergy Medications

## Medications

Medications are not a substitute for avoidance measures. If you can stay away from what you're allergic to, you won't need to take as many medications.

Medications such as antihistamines and decongestants are quick in onset, but often not sufficient for the treatment of significant nasal allergies. Most of them are available over the counter, so you can discuss them with your pharmacist, but please feel free to talk to your doctor about these products too.

## Preventative sprays

Often the best treatment for nasal symptoms is to use a preventative medication regularly. Most of these drugs are steroids. (They do not have the same side effects as the weight-lifter kind of steroids.) They are much better tolerated than steroid pills.

These preventative sprays do not provide quick relief of symptoms. They must be used regularly to prevent next week's symptoms. They usually take about 1 or 2 weeks to work. If they haven't helped after four weeks, you can stop taking them. If your symptoms come back when you stop taking the medication, that probably means that the nose spray was helping after all, and you might want to try them again.

## How to use nasal sprays

1. The first time you use the spray you will have to pump it a few times to get it started. You don't have to do that again, unless it hasn't been used for a long time.
2. Blow your nose first.
3. Be careful to aim up and back. Aim a little bit away from the middle wall, or septum. Sometimes it is easier to get the right angle if you cross your hands over, and spray each nostril using the opposite hand...then the direction seems to naturally aim away from the septum. Try not to blow your nose for a little while after using the spray.

If you get nosebleeds, try a little Vaseline on the nasal septum. This annoying side-effect can be reduced or eliminated by reducing the dose or taking a break from it for a day or two each week (perhaps on weekends). If the bleeding persists, stop the medication and contact your doctor.

In general, once the drugs start to work, you should try to lower dose to find the lowest dose that will maintain the improvement. If you don't take the sprays practically every day, they won't work very well. You won't get very good results if you just use them once in a while when you feel like you need it.

## Over the counter nose sprays

Decongestant nose sprays or drops are available over the counter without a prescription. They may be habit-forming and may actually cause nasal stuffiness and irritation. They are not recommended except for very short periods (generally less than a few days).

## Antihistamines or decongestant tablets

If you want to use antihistamines or decongestant tablets for extra relief on a bad day, you can. You can use all of these nasal medications together if you need to, and you can use them with your asthma medications too, if required.