



University Hospitals Bristol
NHS Foundation Trust

Patient information service
St Michael's Hospital
Adult ear, nose and throat

Nasal irrigation



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What is nasal irrigation?

Nasal irrigation is the process of washing your nose with a salt water solution. This can remove any excess debris or mucus from the nose and sinuses, keeping the nose clean and healthy. Nasal irrigation is also referred to as nasal douching or nasal rinsing. The solution can be mixed up at home, or products can be purchased from pharmacies and the internet.

Reasons for nasal irrigation?

After nasal/sinus surgery

Some operations inside the nose can leave the surface raw and mucus can dry, forming crusts. Nasal irrigation can help prevent dry crusts from forming by washing them away, which can help the healing process after surgery and decrease the risk of infection. It can also help with keeping the sinuses clean and healthy after surgery.

Rhinitis/sinusitis

Inflammation of the nasal lining and sinuses can be caused from sinus disease, allergens or irritants, which leads to excessive and thickened mucus production. Washing this excessive mucus and irritants away can help reduce the amount of inflammation in the nasal passages, and relieve symptoms. Once the nose is clean, this can help expose the lining of the nose which will help absorb nasal sprays or drops prescribed.

How to perform nasal irrigation

Nasal irrigation aids for purchase

There are devices to assist with nasal irrigation available from most local pharmacies and on the internet. These involve irrigation bottles with a nozzle shaped for nasal use.

The bottle provides a smooth flow of solution that thoroughly cleanses the nasal passages. Some manufacturers provide ready-made sachets to mix with water, or ready made sprays. Alternatively you can mix a solution and use the irrigation bottle to wash your nose and sinuses.

Ingredients for nasal irrigation

- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon bicarbonate of soda (baking soda)
- 1/2 pint of boiled water

Nasal irrigation using an irrigation bottle

- wash hands and place ingredients into a clean container
- stir to dissolve the salt and allow to cool to around body temperature
- fill bottle to the marked level (around 240mls)
- follow the instructions provided by manufacturer.

This is an effective method for cleaning your nose and sinuses. If you are unable to purchase an irrigation bottle, on the next page is an alternative method.

Nasal irrigation without an irrigation bottle

- wash hands and place ingredients into a clean container
- stir to dissolve the salt and allow to cool to around body temperature
- standing over a sink, cup the palm of one hand and pour a small amount of the solution into it
- close one nostril using the other hand
- sniff the solution into one nostril at a time
- allow the solution to run out of your nose and into the sink
- repeat this action on the other nostril
- repeat this action several times, until the nose feels clear
- discard any remaining solution.

Nasal irrigation can be carried out several times a day, and a fresh solution should be made each time.

Cautions with nasal irrigation

Ensure the solution is made fresh each time to avoid contamination of the solution.

Some solution may pass into your throat and back of the nose. Sniffing too much solution may cause it to be swallowed or cause choking. Do not swallow the salt water solution as it can make you feel sick, therefore it may not be suitable if you have any swallowing problems. Occasionally there may be some slight stinging.

Notes

Please note that if for any reason you would value a second opinion concerning your diagnosis or treatment, you are entirely within your rights to request this.

The first step would usually be to discuss this with the doctor or other lead clinician who is responsible for your care.

Smoking is the primary cause of preventable illness and premature death. For support in stopping smoking contact **NHS Smokefree on 0300 123 1044**

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