

**Patient Advice Sheet on Septoplasty
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What is my nasal septum?

It is the dividing wall between your nostrils. It is made out of cartilage at the front and thin bone further back. It is covered with a lining membrane. This membrane is called mucosa.

Why do I need the operation?

Your nose is blocked because the nasal septum is out of place. You could have been born with it. It could be due to a bang on the nose. This is affecting your nasal airway. It can be put right.

Do I have to have this operation?

No. It is up to you. It is what we call elective. Without the operation your nose will stay as it is.

Why do I have to wait for the operation?

The cartilage is a growth centre for the nose. If we operate too early the nose may not grow properly.

Will my nose alter shape?

This is always possible. It may happen slowly in the years after the operation. We remove as little cartilage as possible. This is to stop this happening. Any change is usually slight. Often you won't notice it. We can put it right at the time or later.

What else can go wrong?

The problem can come back if the cartilage slips out of place. Occasionally, the septum heals with a hole in it. This may cause no problem. It may cause crusting and blockage. It may whistle when you breathe in. It is difficult to mend. But there are things which can help.

Can anything serious happen?

Serious complications are very uncommon. They are caused by damage to nearby organs. All operations and anaesthetics have risks. Some are serious. The risks are similar to those of everyday life. Examples are flying on holiday; driving in a car or walking down a street.

Are my headaches due to my bent septum?

No.

How long will I be in hospital and off work?

You will usually be in for an overnight stay. Take two weeks off work.

How should I travel home?

You may have a bleed. It is best to go home in a car or a taxi. Avoid public transport.

Will I be asleep?

Usually you are. This is called general anaesthesia. The doctor who makes you go to sleep is called an anaesthetist. He or she will tell you about your anaesthetic. We can do it under local anaesthesia also. We use sprays and injections to "freeze" the nose inside.

How is the operation done?

A cut is made inside the nose and the bent cartilage removed. As this is done the deformities tend to straighten themselves out.

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Will there be anything in my nose afterwards?

Soft plastic splints are used sometimes. They support cartilage when lots of cutting has been done. They stop the insides of the nose sticking together when they are healing. We slide them out after a week. They are held in place with one stitch. You may need a pack to stop bleeding. We seldom use heavy nasal packs now. We use them only if they are really needed. We take packs out after 2 to 4 hours or next morning.

Are there any stitches?

All cuts are on the inside of the nose. The stitches are inside too. They are dissolvable. They don't have to be removed.

What will I feel like afterwards?

You will have some discomfort afterwards which can include:

- A blocked nose. This may vary during the day. It will clear in three to six weeks.
- A runny nose. Blood stained or pink mucus. It will go darker and then dry up in a few weeks.
- Crusting in the nose with scabs over the healing raw areas.
- Pain, headaches or heaviness in the forehead for a few days until the sinuses are working again.
- Numbness of the teeth or roof of the mouth. This usually clears but it can take several weeks.
- A poor sense of smell or taste. This is usually not permanent. If it does not clear, tell us in the clinic.
- An infection in the nose. This is not common. You may have worse pain and even bleeding.

What do I need to avoid afterwards?

- Do not blow the nose hard. This can increase the swelling and obstruction. It may cause bleeding.
- To avoid colds keep away from crowds for ten days. A cold could stop healing or cause bleeding.
- Avoid excessive activity for ten to fifteen days. This can have the same effects as infection.
- Avoid any activity which could make you hot or flushed.

What can I do?

Any normal light activity such as a gentle stroll is OK.

What do I do if any serious bleeding occurs?

- Blow each nostril clear; one at a time.
- Hold your head forward.
- Squeeze the lower fleshy part of the nostrils firmly closed. Use your thumb and first finger.
- Use a watch and time at least ten minutes.
- Put ice in a plastic bag. Add a little water.
- Put the ice pack on the bridge of your nose and your forehead.
- If the bleeding is still going after half an hour, call us.

Do I have to take any treatment after the operation?

- A decongestant nasal spray. This helps clear the nose a bit. Do not use for more than ten days.
- Salt water douches. These are to clear the crusting and blockage.

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- Douche the nostrils alternately with 3-4mls, repeated 3 times, 3 times a day for two weeks.
- Reduce to twice a day for another 5-7 days.
- Then to once a day or stop if you feel you do not need them anymore.
- Steam inhalations. Not the first day. Then steam your nose three times a day before douching. Use a pint of hot (**but not boiling**) water. Do this for two weeks or while it seems to help.

May I ask a question?

At any time. You can also refuse to have the operation at any time. If you ask a question please ask someone suitable. A junior doctor or nurse may not know what you want to know. Please do not ask several doctors the same question and compare answers.