

Nasal Decongestants

Nasal congestion occurs when nasal and adjacent tissues and blood vessels become swollen with excess fluid, causing a “stuffy” feeling. This type of congestion can commonly occur as a symptom of allergies, rhinitis, or sinusitis.

Decongestants such as Afrin or Neo-Synephrine help to shrink the blood vessels in the nasal membranes and allow the air passages to open up. Decongestants are chemically similar to adrenaline (your body’s natural decongestant) which is also a type of stimulant.

People with nasal and sinus congestion often self-medicate with over-the-counter drugs such as decongestant nasal sprays. Nasal decongestant sprays bring immediate relief to the nasal mucous membranes without the usual side effects (jittery or nervous feeling, difficulty in going to sleep and elevated blood pressure and pulse rate) that accompany decongestant pills or liquids that you swallow.

Examples of some common decongestant nose sprays include: oxymetazoline (Afrin, Dristan, others) and tetrahydrozoline (Tyzine), phenylephrine, xylometazoline, and naphazoline.

Over-the-counter decongestant nose sprays should only be used for urgent, emergency, and short-term use. Because repetitive, prolonged use can lead to a decrease in effectiveness and rebound congestion (called Rhinitis medicamentosa). As a result, some people can become trapped in a cycle of overuse and dependence that can last for months or years. The swelling of the nasal passages caused by rebound congestion may lead to permanent blockage of nasal breathing and would need to be treated surgically.

Consult your doctor to see if decongestant nasal sprays are the right treatment for your nasal and sinus congestion. Make sure to always read and follow the product’s instructions before use.