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# Nasal Discharge: Cause, Treatments, and Prevention



Medically reviewed by [Stacy Sampson, D.O.](#) — By Carmella Wint — Updated on [September 19, 2019](#)

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## What is nasal discharge?

Mucus isn't just a slimy material in your nose — it actually has a useful purpose. It traps bacteria, other germs, and debris, and prevents them from entering your lungs.

In some cases, such as when you have a cold or allergies, mucus may flow out of your nose or down your throat. When mucus comes out of your nose, it's called nasal discharge. It can also be called post-nasal drip or rhinorrhea.

Although it's annoying, nasal discharge is common and usually goes away on its own. But in some cases, it's a sign of an underlying health problem that might require medical attention.

## What causes nasal discharge?

There are many potential causes of nasal discharge. Some of the most common include infections and allergies.

### Common cold or flu

The common cold is caused by a viral infection in your nose and throat. Many different types of viruses can cause it. Although it may make you feel miserable, it's typically harmless in the long run.



The flu is caused by a virus that attacks your nose, throat, and lungs. Strains of influenza virus are constantly changing. The flu can be dangerous for people who are at high risk for complications. This includes young children, older adults, and people with compromised immune systems.

Nasal discharge is a very common symptom for both the common cold and the flu. When you're sick with these illnesses, your body produces extra mucus to trap the virus before it can reach your lungs and other parts of your body. Some of this mucus leaves your body through your nose.

## Allergies

You might experience nasal discharge if you inhale, eat, or touch certain substances to which you're allergic. Materials that cause an allergic reaction are called allergens. Common allergens include dust, pet hair, and grass. Your body reacts to the allergens in a similar fashion as though they were harmful bacteria, causing your nose to run.

## Sinusitis

Sinusitis occurs when your sinuses, or the passages of your nose, become inflamed with pain, swelling, and redness. This can narrow your nasal passages, causing breathing difficulties and mucus buildup. If you have this condition, mucus may drain out of your nose. In some cases, you might feel it draining into your throat.

Mucus associated with sinusitis is usually thick. It can also have a yellow or green hue to it.

## Other potential causes

Other potential causes of a runny nose, or nasal discharge, include:

- chickenpox
- pregnancy



- deviated septum
- cluster headache
- drug addiction
- tobacco smoke
- dry air

## How can you treat nasal discharge?

Your recommended treatment plan will depend on the underlying cause of your nasal discharge. In many cases, you can take steps to relieve your symptoms using simple [home remedies](#). In some cases, your doctor may recommend medications or other treatments.

If a cold or flu is causing your nasal discharge, your treatment options may be limited. In most cases, your body will recover on its own. You should be sure to get plenty of rest and drink lots of fluids. Over-the-counter medications may help relieve some of your symptoms. If your flu symptoms are severe, your doctor might prescribe you an antiviral medication. This may reduce the time it takes for you to heal.

### Home remedies

Thick and sticky mucus can cause problems with your breathing. It can also put you at greater risk of complications, such as ear infections. Take steps to thin out your mucus. It may help relieve your symptoms and lower your risk of complications.

To thin out your mucus, it may help to:

- drink plenty of fluids
- use a saline nasal spray
- turn on a humidifier to add water to the air
- inhale steam from a bowl of hot water

Don't use a decongestant nasal spray for more than three days in a row



unless your doctor has told you to do so.

## Antihistamines

Antihistamines are drugs that can help prevent and treat the symptoms of allergic reactions. Some antihistamines can make you extremely drowsy. Always check the label for recommendations about operating heavy machinery or performing other tasks while taking antihistamines.

Antihistamines can also react with some other medications. Be sure to talk to your doctor before taking antihistamines, especially if you already use muscle relaxers, sleeping pills, or sedatives.

## Can you prevent nasal discharge?

You can't prevent all cases of nasal discharge. But you can take steps to lower your risk of developing some of the conditions that cause excessive nasal discharge.

To lower your chances of contracting the common cold or flu:

- wash your hands often to keep them free of disease-causing germs
- use a tissue when blowing your nose and throw your used tissues away immediately
- wash your hands after blowing your nose
- get a flu vaccine every year

If you have allergies, take steps to avoid your allergens. This can help prevent the symptoms of an allergic reaction, including nasal discharge. If you don't know the cause of your allergic symptoms, keep a daily journal of your activities and symptoms. This may help you and your doctor identify your allergens. Your doctor or allergist may also recommend allergy testing.

Avoiding cigarette smoke and other irritants can also help keep your nasal passages from becoming irritated and inflamed.



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