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Preventing and Treating Nosebleeds

If you take warfarin (Coumadin)

This handout explains what causes nosebleeds, the different types of nosebleeds, prevention tips, and treatments.

What causes nosebleeds?

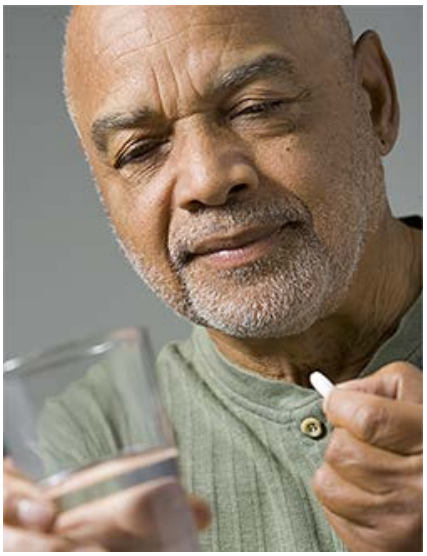
The nose is lined with many small blood vessels. When a vessel breaks, it causes a nosebleed. Common causes are:

- Blowing your nose a lot, often because of a cold or allergies
- Breathing very dry or cold air
- Injury to your nose, or near your nose
- High blood pressure

Nosebleeds are common. Most times, they can be treated at home.

Why do I need to know about nosebleeds?

The medicine warfarin (Coumadin) affects your blood's ability to clot. If you take warfarin, you are at higher risk for nosebleeds.



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Types of Nosebleeds

There are 2 types of nosebleeds:

- **Anterior nosebleeds** are the most common. They start in the front of the nose. Blood usually drips out of the nostrils. It may drip down the back of the nose and into the throat.
- **Posterior nosebleeds** are less common, but they can be more severe. They start in the back of the nose. Blood usually runs down into the throat. Posterior nosebleeds can be harder to stop. They may cause choking if there is a lot of blood.

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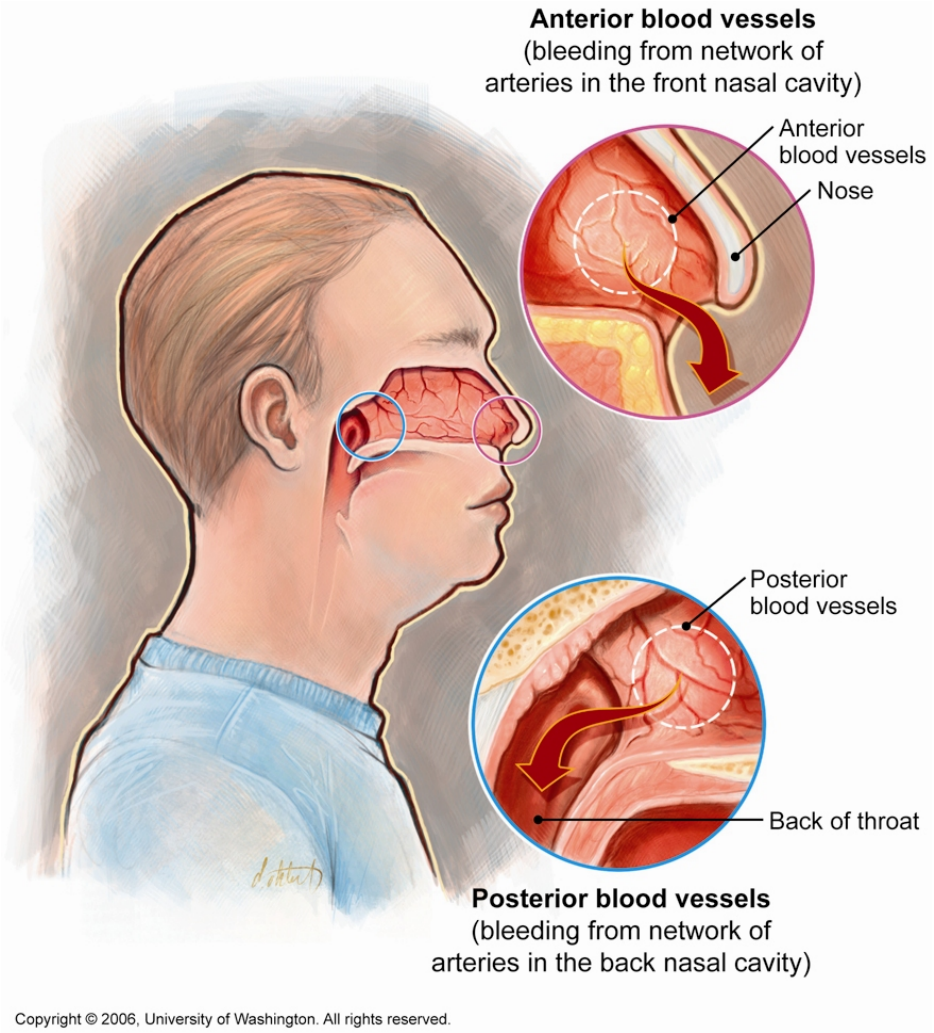
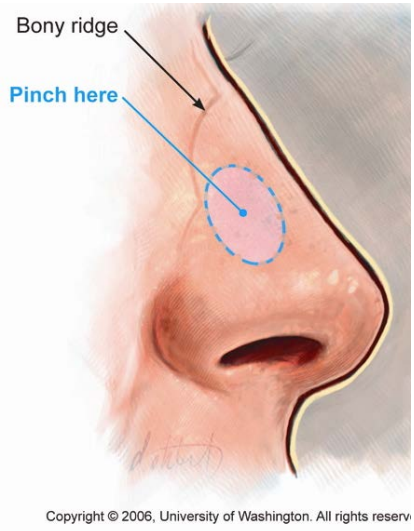


Anterior and posterior nosebleeds.



Step 3: Use gentle pressure with your thumb and index finger to pinch just below the bony ridge of your nose.

How to Treat a Nosebleed

If you have a nosebleed, follow these steps:

1. Stay calm.
2. Sit or stand upright and lean slightly forward. This keeps blood from going down the back of your throat.
3. Pinch your nose with your thumb and index finger, just below the bony ridge of your nose (see drawing at left). Breathe through your mouth.
4. Apply pressure for 5 to 10 minutes.
5. If bleeding has not stopped after pinching your nose for 10 minutes, apply pressure again for 5 more minutes.

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6. If your nosebleed has not stopped after you have applied pressure for 15 minutes, place an ice pack on the bridge of your nose, upper lip, or the back of your neck. This may help to constrict the blood vessels and reduce the bleeding.
7. If the nosebleed has not stopped in 30 minutes, **seek medical attention**.

Is a nosebleed a warning sign?

Most nosebleeds are harmless. But they may be a sign of something more serious. Sometimes, nosebleeds can be a sign of high blood pressure. If you are taking warfarin (Coumadin), nosebleeds can be a sign that your blood is too thin.

To lower your risk of bleeding, contact the Anticoagulation Clinic if you:

- Start taking a new prescription, over-the-counter medicine, or herbal supplement
- Have cold or flu symptoms, or any change in your health
- Make changes in your diet
- Drink a lot of alcohol
- Take an extra dose of warfarin
- Have any bleeding or a lot of bruising

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

Anticoagulation Clinics:

- ❑ UWMC - Montlake: 206.598.4874
- ❑ UWMC - Northwest: 206.668.1282
- ❑ Seattle Cancer Care Alliance: 206.606.6756
- ❑ Harborview Medical Center: 206.744.2976

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