

# Ephedrine for nasal congestion

**Clinical author's note Michael Stewart 16/01/2024:** At the time of review there are no branded or generic nasal products containing ephedrine available in the UK. Ephedrine nose drops may be available as a special order in the UK and may still be available in other countries. This Medicine Leaflet is based on medical information available in the UK at the time of writing and is left here for reference purposes only. Please also refer to the manufacturer's information supplied with your medicine.

Ephedrine nasal drops can help to ease a blocked nose.

Put one or two drops into each nostril up to four times a day. You can use the drops for up to seven days if required, but do not use them for longer periods.

Any side-effects are usually mild.

# About ephedrine nasal drops

Type of medicine	A nose (nasal) decongestant
Used for	A blocked nose (nasal congestion)
Available as	Nose drops

A common symptom of a cold is a blocked (congested) nose. A stuffy, blocked-up feeling in your nose can also occur in the absence of a cold. This is because the inside lining of your nose is sensitive to changes in the atmosphere (such as temperature and humidity changes) and this also can lead to symptoms of nasal congestion.

You may find a hot steamy shower or a steam inhalation will help to clear a blocked nose but, where this does not provide sufficient relief, a decongestant such as ephedrine may be useful. Ephedrine causes the small blood vessels in your nose to become narrower. This reduces the thickness of the lining of your nose which is causing the congestion, and relieves the blocked-up feeling.

Ephedrine nose drops (also called nasal drops) are available on a prescription from a doctor or dentist. You may also be able to buy a small pack of nose drops from a pharmacy, without a prescription. Ephedrine drops are suitable for adults and for children aged 12 years or over. They are not suitable for children under 12 years of age.

## Before using ephedrine nasal drops

Some medicines are not suitable for people with certain conditions, and sometimes a medicine may only be used if extra care is taken. For these reasons, before you start using ephedrine nasal drops it is important that your doctor, dentist, or pharmacist knows:

- If you are pregnant or breastfeeding.
- If you have diabetes, high blood pressure, or heart disease.

- If you have an overactive thyroid gland, or any problems with your prostate gland or kidneys.
- If you have ever had an allergic reaction to a medicine.
- If you are taking any other medicines. This includes any medicines you are taking which are available to buy without a prescription, as well as herbal and complementary medicines. You must **not** use ephedrine if you have taken a medicine for depression, known as a monoamine-oxidase inhibitor (MAOI) within the previous two weeks.

## How to use ephedrine nasal drops

1. Blow your nose gently to clear it.
2. Unscrew the dropper from the bottle. Make sure the tip of the dropper is under the surface of the liquid in the bottle, and then squeeze the bulb of the dropper to part fill the dropper with the liquid.
3. Tilt your head back a little and bring the part-filled dropper close to one of your nostrils. (Do not put the dropper into your nostril.)
4. Gently squeeze the bulb of the dropper to release one or two drops of the liquid into your nostril. Repeat the process to release one or two drops into the other nostril also. Try not to touch your nose with the dropper as you do this.
5. Keep your head tilted back for a few moments to allow the drops to spread around the inside of your nose.
6. Close the bottle by screwing the dropper back on to the bottle gently.

## Getting the most from your treatment

- Before you start the treatment, read the manufacturer's printed information leaflet from inside the pack. This will give you a step-by-step guide of how to use the drops, and will also provide you with a full list of the side-effects which you may experience from using them.
- The usual dose is one or two drops into each nostril, three or four times a day when needed. Do not use the drops more than four times a day.

- Ephedrine nasal drops should be used for short periods of time only. Do not use them for more than seven days. This is because the downside of using the drops is that nasal congestion can often return (recur) when you stop using them. This is called rebound congestion, and it can lead to cycles of further problems with congestion. Using the drops for only a few days when necessary will help to prevent this from becoming a problem.
- Bottles of nose drops should only be used by one person. This is to avoid spreading infection from one person to another. Do not 'share' the bottle with other people.
- Nasal congestion can be eased by inhaling warm moist air. Many people find that having a hot shower is often the best way to relieve their symptoms.

## Can ephedrine nasal drops cause problems?

Along with their useful effects, many medicines can cause unwanted side-effects although not everyone experiences them. The table below lists some of the side-effects that have been associated with using ephedrine nasal drops. You will find a full list of side-effects in the manufacturer's information leaflet supplied with your drops. The unwanted effects often improve as your body adjusts to the new medicine, but speak with your doctor or pharmacist if any of the following continue or become troublesome.

<b>Ephedrine nasal drops side-effects</b>	<b>What can I do if I experience this?</b>
Irritation in your nose such as burning, soreness, dryness, stinging, itching or sneezing	These should soon pass. If any become troublesome, ask your pharmacist for advice
Feeling sick (nausea)	Avoid rich or spicy foods
Headache	Drink plenty of water. If the headaches continue, stop using the product and ask your pharmacist for advice about other treatments

If you experience any other symptoms which you think may be due to the drops, speak with your doctor or pharmacist for further advice.

## How to store ephedrine nasal drops

- Keep all medicines out of the reach and sight of children.
- Store in a cool, dry place, away from direct heat and light.
- To avoid contamination, do not keep part-used bottles of nose drops to use later. Throw away any unused solution after each course of treatment.

## Important information about all medicines

Never use more than the prescribed dose. If you suspect that someone has swallowed some of this medicine by accident, contact the accident and emergency department of your local hospital for advice.

This medicine is for you. Never give it to other people even if their condition appears to be the same as yours.

If you are having an operation or dental treatment, tell the person carrying out the treatment which medicines you are taking.

If you buy any medicines, check with a pharmacist that they are safe to take with your other medicines.

Do not keep out-of-date or unwanted medicines. Take them to your local pharmacy which will dispose of them for you.

If you have any questions about this medicine ask your pharmacist.

Report suspected side effects to medicines, vaccines, e-cigarettes, medical device incidents, defective or falsified (fake) products to the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency to ensure safe and effective use.

## Further reading

- [Medicines Complete BNF 87th Edition](#); British Medical Association and Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain, London.

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