

Patient Education

The snuffling infant

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What is the cause of snuffling?

Snuffling is usually caused by a viral infection that infects the upper respiratory tract (airways) particularly the nose. This called rhinitis which is a common minor infection in adults but in children it causes considerable discomfort because the nasal passages are so small. This makes it difficult to breathe through the nose.

The usual virus is the one that causes the common cold.

What are the symptoms?

- nose blockage with mucus that can be yellow or green
- feeding difficulty caused by the nose blockage
- coughing
- irritability with crying.

What are the risks?

It is usually not a serious problem and appears worse than it actually is although you may not think so at the moment. Sometimes infection with bacteria can develop and the danger signs to contact your doctor are:

- loss of activity
- wheezing or other breathing difficulty
- swelling and infection of the eye
- neck stiffness
- an unusual high fever
- other unusual symptoms.

A robust crying child is not as big a cause for concern as a whimpering, pale, inactive child.

What is the treatment?

Since the problem is caused by a virus, antibiotics do not cure it so they are not prescribed unless a bacterial infection such as a middle ear infection complicates the problem. Your doctor will be able to check your child's ears, throat and chest to discover such infections.

Pain killers

To ease children's discomfort when they seem uncomfortable or distressed give paracetamol mixture or drops according to the recommended age dosage.

Clean the nose

Cleaning the infected mucus from the nose is an easy task for parents. Make a salt solution by mixing a teaspoon of salt with 500 mL of boiled water. Using a cotton bud gently clear out the secretions from the nose about every two waking hours.

Nose drops

When the nose has been cleaned instil saline nose drops or spray (eg, Narium Nasal Mist). An alternative is a paediatric nose drop or spray preparations such as Vasylox Junior or Otrivin if the saline drops are not effective and if there is a problem with feeding. These stronger drops should only be used for 4 to 5 days.