

About septal surgery

This leaflet gives information about septal surgery. Please ask staff if you have any questions.

What is septal surgery?

The partition in the middle of your nose is a thin piece of cartilage and bone called the septum. In some people, the septum is bent, and can block the nose. Sometimes this can happen through injury, but often it just grows that way. Either way, doctors can operate to straighten it.

Why have septal surgery?

If you have a blocked nose because of a bent septum, an operation can help you to breathe more easily. Also, sometimes doctors need to straighten the septum to give them more room to do other things, such as sinus surgery.

Do I have to have septal surgery?

A bent septum does you no harm, so you can just leave it if you want to. Only you can decide if it is causing you so much bother that you want it straightened.

Only an operation can fix a bent septum. But nasal spray or drops prescribed by your doctor can help treat swelling in the nose, which might also be making your nose feel blocked.

Before your operation

Arrange for a couple of weeks off work and check that you have a relative or / friend who can take you home and look after you for a few days after the operation.

We may ask you to attend the pre-assessment clinic, either on the day of your out-patient clinic appointment or following a telephone health questionnaire. This is to ensure that you are fit for your surgery.

How is the operation done?

It takes about half an hour and you are given a general anaesthetic. It is all done inside your nose – there will be no scars on your face. The doctors make a cut inside your nose and straighten out the septum by taking away some of the cartilage and bone. The cut is then closed with some stitches.

Will I have to stay in hospital?

You will go home on the day of your operation, as long as the operation is straightforward and we think that your general state of health and home circumstances are suitable.

Packs and splints

The doctors may need to put a short dressing in each side of your nose to keep things in place and prevent bleeding. These dressings are called 'packs', and they block your nose so that you have to breathe through your mouth. They are removed before you go home. This may be uncomfortable and you may get a little bit of bleeding which will usually settle quickly.

You may have some pieces of plastic in your nose to aid healing. These are called 'splints' and they will be taken out in the out-patients clinic after about a week.

Does it hurt?

The front of your nose may be tender with some swelling and you may also experience headaches. The painkillers you have at home should help manage this pain. You may also get some blood-coloured watery fluid from your nose for the first two weeks or so – this is normal.

How long will I be off work?

Ask your nurse if you need a sick note for your time in hospital. You will need to rest at home for at least a week afterwards. If you do heavy lifting and carrying at work, you should take two weeks off. You should not play football or other sports for about a month.

After you leave hospital

Do not blow your nose for 48 hours and try to sneeze with your mouth open to prevent it from starting to bleed. If it does bleed, pinch your nose for 10 minutes whilst sitting upright with your head tilted forward. It will also help to apply ice to the bridge of your nose and to suck ice. Try to avoid hot food and drinks as these can increase the chance of bleeding.

To prevent further bleeding we advise you not to fly for 2 weeks after your nasal surgery.

Your nose will be stuffy and blocked for a few weeks and during this time you should try and stay away from dusty or smoky places. We may give you some drops or spray to help reduce this congestion, but you may experience these changes for up to 3 months.

You don't have to come back to have your stitches removed - they will dissolve & fall out by themselves.

If you are worried about your nose after you leave hospital, contact:


Can there be problems?

Septal surgery is safe, but every operation has a small risk. Please discuss this with your doctor when you visit the hospital. The most common problems are:

- Sometimes your nose bleeds after the operation and we may need to put packs in to stop it.
- Infection is very rare after this operation, but if it happens it can be serious. So if your nose is getting more painful or more blocked see your GP.
- Rarely the operation may leave a hole in your septum, which causes a whistling sound when you breathe because air goes from one side of your nose to the other. Most of the time it causes no problems and needs no treatment, but further surgery can be carried out if necessary to repair the hole.
- Very rarely you may notice that the shape of your nose has changed slightly, with a dip in the bridge of your nose. Most people do not have any changes, but if you are not happy, it can be fixed with surgery.
- Very rarely, you may have some numbness of your teeth, which usually settles in time.

© RNTNE Hospital / Patient Information Programme 2008

www.royalfree.nhs.uk

Royal Free Hampstead 
NHS Trust