

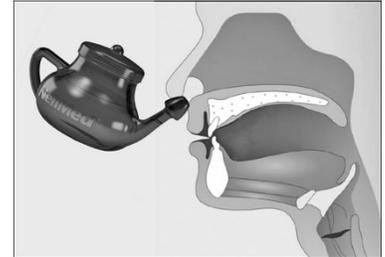


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## Nasal Irrigation

Nasal irrigation can be very helpful for problems like sinusitis, rhinitis and allergies. It's also safe when done correctly. Even young children can learn how to do this, to reduce the need for drugs or surgery. It's one of the few things in medicine that is safe, cheap and works! The idea is to direct a steady stream of water - more volume than just a spray or mist - into one nostril. It flows into the nose, goes around the back of the septum (the wall in the middle of the nose) and then comes out of the other nostril. It's like a river running through the nose, and it does several things.



First, the flow mechanically cleans out debris and dried mucus, improving drainage of the sinuses. Second, keeping the nose moist helps defend against infection. And third, the salt solution works as a safe and natural decongestant, drawing fluid out of the nasal tissue by osmosis to open the nasal airway.

There are several ways to do irrigation. I find the gentlest and most effective way (especially for children) is something called a Neti Pot. This is just a little "teapot" that has a bulb on the spout that fits comfortably into the nostril. There are a number of brands, some simple plastic, some fancier ceramic, but they all do the same thing. The company NeilMed makes a popular one. It may take some time to get this to work, but it soon becomes easy. Just find the right angle to tilt your head, say "ahhh", and practice. You can see a video at [snotdoctor.com/netipot](http://snotdoctor.com/netipot) - go there using this QR code -->



You can also use a squeeze bottle, providing more pressure, but this is difficult for kids, and uncomfortable if done wrong. The Neti Pot works by gravity – less likely to cause pain and choking before you get the hang of it. Finally, there is a powered device called a Navage, which works very well, but may be difficult for children.

It is **very** important to use clean water when mixing up these solutions. Although irrigation is safe, there have been reports of serious or even fatal infections from contaminated water. To do this safely, prepare a week's supply of the solution, keep it in the refrigerator and use it to fill the Neti Pot, letting it reach room temperature before using it. Boiling the water is the best way to make sure that it is clean. You can also use distilled or sterile bottled water if you are away from home, but make sure you refrigerate these bottles after opening them. There are some filters (0.2 micron or smaller) that are adequate for removing germs from water, but these can be inconsistent in their action, so it's better to use the boiling method. To sterilize water, it should reach a rolling boil for at least one minute, or for three minutes at an altitude more than a mile above sea level.

Most irrigation devices come with packages to mix with water. You can also purchase packages that contain Xylitol, a natural sugar that helps with nasal congestion. While these are convenient (especially when traveling), you can make your own irrigation solution in bulk, with better control of the ingredients. In some cases, the packages can produce a fairly strong irrigation solution that can cause stinging or burning, so it's OK to start with less of the package contents, to make a more diluted solution. After a while, it may be possible to go back to full strength (which works better for keeping the nose decongested).

This is my recipe for the solution. Boil one quart of tap water, then add:

- 3 rounded teaspoons kosher or canning salt (i.e. salt with no iodine or preservatives)
- 1 rounded teaspoon baking soda
- 3 teaspoons of glycerine or corn syrup (not absolutely necessary, but may help prevent drying or irritation)

Keep this in the refrigerator, and let it reach room temperature before use. Be careful if using a microwave, this can heat the solution unevenly. If you are very obstructed (with a cold or sinus infection) don't try to force this. And finally, stop immediately (and let me know) if you have any eye or ear pain with irrigation.