



Blocked Nose

The Department of Ear, Nose & Throat (ENT) - Head & Neck Surgery provides a wide range of surgical services for adult patients with ENT, head and neck diseases. Patients are referred from polyclinics, general practitioners, emergency services or transferred from other departments within Ng Teng Fong General Hospital or other healthcare facilities, including nursing homes, community and other hospitals. Our team of highly-trained ENT-Head & Neck surgeons and allied healthcare professionals aim to provide the best possible care to our patients.



What causes a blocked nose?

Blocked nose and frequent runny nose is a very common patient complaint and the possible causes are:

The common cold

This is caused by viruses and it is not unusual to catch it two to three times a year. Children who attend school or day care centres where the virus is rampant may catch it from their peers. The symptoms are mild fever, muscle aches, runny or congested nose, mildly discoloured mucus, cough and a mild sore throat lasting between five and seven days. It is unusual for healthy adults to catch the common cold more than three times a year.

Recurrent or chronic sinus infection

Sinusitis is a bacterial infection of the air spaces in our cheeks, forehead and nose, and is caused by blocked sinus openings. The symptoms are flu-like, but patients usually experience other symptoms such as facial pain, post-nasal drip, discoloured mucus and an altered sense of smell.

Allergic rhinitis

This is an allergic inflammation of the nasal lining caused by airborne allergens such as dust mites. Symptoms include sneezing, runny nose, blocked nose and itching around the eyes. Allergic rhinitis commonly co-exists with asthma, another common allergic airway disease.



Vasomotor rhinitis

Also known as non-allergic rhinitis, this is an inflammation of the nasal lining caused by pollution, cigarette smoke, certain odours, humidity, temperature of inhaled air and hormonal changes in the body. The symptoms can be similar to allergic rhinitis but there is less sneezing and itching.

Recurrent adenoid infection/adenoid enlargement in children

Adenoid* infection and swelling is uncommon in children younger than 12 years old. Children will have recurrent flu-like symptoms as well as fever, sore throat, snoring and frequent middle ear infections.

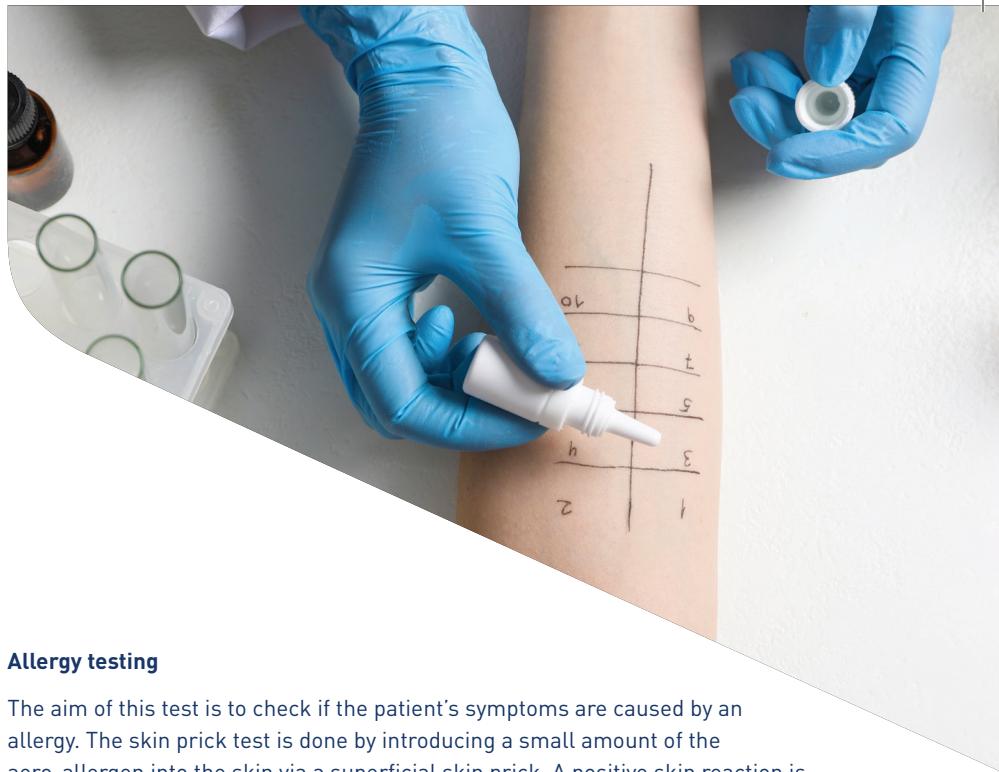
*Adenoids and tonsils are made up of lymphoid tissue with adenoids being at the back of the nose and tonsils located in the throat.

How is a diagnosis made?

Nasoendoscopic examination

In this procedure, a thin fibreoptic scope is attached to a camera to examine the nasal cavity. It can be performed on adults and children in their conscious state.





Allergy testing

The aim of this test is to check if the patient's symptoms are caused by an allergy. The skin prick test is done by introducing a small amount of the aero-allergen into the skin via a superficial skin prick. A positive skin reaction is called a wheal and flare. The blood test detects antibodies to airborne allergens. Common airborne allergens are house dust mite, animal dander and mould.

CT scan of the paranasal sinus

The CT scan sinus is the gold standard X-ray to confirm or rule out the diagnosis of sinusitis.

What are the treatment options?

Medication

Medication commonly used to treat the above conditions include antihistamines, saline douching, antibiotics, intranasal steroids and anti-leukotrienes. These medication are taken over a period of time. Medical treatment of allergic rhinitis aims to control the symptoms but cannot cure the disease. Immunotherapy is a treatment for allergic rhinitis that aims to cure through desensitisation of the patient to the allergen. An allergen extract in liquid form is introduced under the tongue for three to five years (sublingual immunotherapy). The allergen extract can also be injected under the skin (subcutaneous immunotherapy).

Surgical intervention

This is reserved for patients who do not respond to medication or as an adjunct to medication for those with severe symptoms.

- **Inferior turbinate reduction surgery**

The inferior turbinates swell due to allergic or vasomotor rhinitis causing a blocked nose that does not always respond to medication. The swollen turbinates can be surgically reduced using radiofrequency energy, microdebriders or cutting.

- **Functional endoscopic sinus surgery**

A procedure performed through the nostrils under general anaesthetic to unblock the sinuses in patients with chronic sinusitis, and those who do not respond to medication.

- **Tonsillectomy and adenoidectomy**

This is an operation to remove unhealthy and enlarged adenoids tonsils to bring significant benefit to a growing child.



Notes

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