



TURBINATE SURGERY

Department of Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery
VCU Health Systems

I. Turbinate Surgery Basics

The turbinates are normal structures that act as the natural radiators of the nose, warming and humidifying the air so that dry, cold air does not reach the lungs. Similar to how a radiator warms the air because of hot water running through its pipes, the turbinates work by having many blood channels filled with warm blood. These blood channels can swell, causing enlargement of the turbinates and nasal congestion. This can result from a viral upper respiratory infection (cold or flu), sinus infection, allergy, or even just assuming a reclined position. Reducing the size of the turbinates can help reduce nasal congestion, and improve one's ability to breathe through the nose. This can be done either by removing a portion of the turbinates, or shrinking them with electric current (cautery). This is usually done in the office under local anesthesia. Your surgeon will discuss with you what method will be used.

II. Post-procedure Issues

1. Pain

Most patients will experience the equivalent of a head cold, including congestion, nasal discharge, and headache, for 1 – 2 weeks after turbinate surgery. Pain is usually mild; prescription pain medications may be needed for a few days after the surgery. A prescription will be given at the time of surgery. Mild discomfort may be treated with Tylenol. Please avoid any ibuprofen-based pain medications (Motrin or Advil), as well as aspirin, for two days after the procedure, as these can lead to postoperative bleeding.

2. Nasal Hygiene

Blood and mucus within the nasal passages can solidify, blocking the nose and making breathing difficult. To reduce this problem, an over-the-counter nasal saline spray (available in any drug store) should be used, three to four puffs to each side of the nose, every one to two hours during the daytime. This will help moisten the mucus crusts and promote drainage. A cool mist humidifier placed at the bedside at night is also helpful.

3. Activities Avoid strenuous activity for two days following the procedure, as significant exertion will raise the blood pressure and increase the chance of bleeding. It is also best to avoid blowing the nose for two days. If one has to sneeze it is best to open the mouth rather than let the force of the sneeze pass through the nose.

4. Bleeding A small amount of bloody nasal discharge or drops of blood in the back of the throat are not uncommon for 1 – 2 days following turbinate surgery. Profuse or continuous bleeding should be reported to your doctor immediately. In the event of bleeding, it is best to squeeze the soft part of the nose closed, and tilt the head down (forward, not back) for 5 minutes. Application of a nasal decongestant spray such as oxymetazoline (Afrin) or Neo-Synephrine may also reduce such bleeding.

5. Medications **a) Nasal saline spray** (over the counter) 3-4 sprays to each side of the nose every 1-2 hours.

b) Afrin (oxymetazoline) spray (over the counter) 2 sprays to each side of the nose twice per day for 3-4 days, then stop (longer use may actually cause congestion).

c) Prescription: _____

6. For follow-up: Richmond Medical Commons/Stony Point Office (804) 323-0830

Downtown VCUHS Office – AD Williams Bldg (804) 628-4368

To schedule a follow up visit in _____ weeks.

7. Contacts For problems during business hours (Monday through Friday, 8 am – 5 pm) please call the office at which you are usually seen: Richmond Medical Commons/Stony Point Office (804) 323-0830; Downtown VCUHS – AD Williams Building Office (804) 628-4368. Ask to talk to a nurse or your doctor. After business hours (5 pm – 8 am and weekends) please call the VCU Health Systems page operator at (804) 828-0951 and ask to speak to the otolaryngologist (Ear, Nose and Throat doctor) on call.