

Emergency Department Online

BROKEN NOSE (NASAL FRACTURE)

This leaflet explains what to do after a suspected broken nose including how to care for your injury at home, when to seek urgent help, and what follow-up or treatment might be recommended.

What is a nasal fracture?

A nasal fracture is a break in the bones of the nose. It's the most common facial bone injury, typically caused by falls, sports injuries, or fights. Most nasal fractures heal on their own within 3 weeks.

Signs and symptoms

You might have a broken nose if you notice:

- A change in the shape or position of your nose
- Swelling and bruising
- Nosebleeds
- Pain and tenderness
- Clicking (crepitus) or movement of the nasal bones
- Blocked nasal passages
- Cuts or wounds near the nose
- Clear fluid leaking from one nostril (this may be serious)

Seek urgent medical attention if you have:

- Persistent nosebleeds not stopping after 10-15 minutes of pinching the soft part of the nose
- Clear watery fluid from one nostril
- Purple swelling inside your nostrils (possible septal haematoma)
- Eye pain, double vision, or blurred vision
- Severe headache, vomiting, or confusion
- Neck pain or tingling/numbness in the arms/legs

Diagnosis

X-rays are not routinely used because nasal bones don't show up well on X-rays. Plain films (X-rays) are thought to miss up to 50% of fractures.

Diagnosis is usually made by a clinical examination. An X-ray may be requested if other facial injuries are suspected.

What happens if I have a cut (laceration)?

If you have a cut over your nose at the site of the injury:

- You may be given antibiotics to reduce the risk of infection, especially if the cut is deep or the bone is exposed.
- The wound may be cleaned and closed using either medical glue, adhesive strips, or stitches depending on its size and depth.

What is a septal haematoma?

The septum is the firm but flexible structure that separates your two nostrils. A septal haematoma is a collection of blood between the lining of the septum and the cartilage or bone beneath it.

It may appear as a soft, swollen area inside the nose and can block one or both nostrils.

If left untreated, a septal haematoma can lead to complications such as infection, permanent damage to the septum or even collapse of the nose. If your doctor suspects this, they may need to drain it in a minor procedure.

Initial care at home

✓ Do

- Apply ice packs to reduce swelling
- Take simple painkillers such as paracetamol or ibuprofen if needed for pain
- Treat any nosebleeds by pinching the soft part of the nose for 10-15 minutes. Lean forward and breathe through your mouth whilst doing this.

✗ Don't

- Try to straighten your nose yourself
- Blow or pick your nose until healed
- Wear glasses until swelling has gone down (unless essential)
- Play contact sports for at least 6 weeks
- Do heavy physical activity for 2 weeks

Follow-up: What happens next?

After your initial hospital visit, you may be referred for follow-up to assess the need for further treatment once the swelling has reduced.

Depending on local practice, this follow-up may happen in one of two ways:

ENT Clinic Appointment:

- Some hospitals will contact you around 5–7 days after your injury to offer a review in the Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT) clinic
- If needed, a minor procedure (MUA) can be arranged to straighten the nose

GP Review:

- In other areas, you may be asked to see your GP after the swelling has gone down
- If your GP is concerned about the appearance, breathing, or possible complications, they will refer you to ENT for further assessment and treatment

What is MUA (Manipulation Under Anaesthesia)?

MUA is a short procedure where the nasal bones are repositioned to improve the shape of the nose or ease breathing.

If you are happy with your breathing and how your nose looks, MUA is not necessary.

If performed, it needs to be done within 3 weeks of the injury — ideally between 7–14 days — before the bones begin to set.

Depending on the circumstances, the procedure may be performed:

- Under local anaesthetic (you are awake, and the nose is numbed with injections and spray)
- Under general anaesthetic (you are asleep, usually if the injury is more complex or you prefer not to be awake)

Your ENT team will discuss the most suitable option for you based on your symptoms and preferences.

Before the procedure:

- You may be asked not to eat or drink for a few hours if having a general anaesthetic
- Inform the doctor of any allergies or previous reactions to anaesthetic agents

During the procedure:

- The nasal bones are gently pushed back into a better position
- The procedure usually only takes a few minutes

After the procedure:

- Some soreness and mild bleeding are normal
- Pain relief like paracetamol or ibuprofen can be taken
- Most people can return to normal activities (apart from contact sports) the next day
- Avoid any risk of knocking the nose again for 6 weeks to allow full healing

Risks of MUA

- Nose may not fully return to its original shape
- In some cases, repositioning is not possible if the bones have already set
- Minor bleeding or bruising can occur