

Delivering a Blow to your Sinuses

Nose Blowing

As parents how many times have we told our kids "blow your nose!" when their constant sniffing and snorting is making us crazy? And how many times have we kept blowing and blowing to try to clear our noses of that obnoxious stuff that plugs us up when we have a cold? Nose blowing has always been considered a virtue in our society, as long as it takes place behind a tissue or handkerchief. Public nose blowing is much more acceptable than sniffing. Of course, southern style nose-blowing (performed without the aid of a Kleenex) on an outdoor venture is still for the most part reserved for those moments when nobody's looking. I've always been a dedicated nose blower. One of the few satisfying experiences that accompany a cold is that feeling, after I blow, of being able to once again, for a few moments, feel a few molecules of air enter my lungs from both sides of my nose. However, it looks like science is about to take even that from us. I'm referring to a recent study in which researchers found that nose blowing generated pressures within the nose 10 times greater than those generated when sneezing or coughing. They also found that the equivalent of 20 drops of fluid flowed from the nose into one of the sinus cavities during blowing, while only a trace of fluid did so with a sneeze. In the same study CT scans were done on volunteers after putting liquid x-ray dye into their noses and having them blow. The dye was found within the sinuses of all the volunteers, and in one even air bubbles were seen. I'm afraid the message is clear: the harder you blow, the greater the chances of a sinus infection. Does this mean that we can never blow again? I don't think I can bear that thought. I plan to keep on blowing, just perhaps not quite as hard, or perhaps use nasal irrigation (see NVN October 20, 2000). Remember also that drinking lots of fluids makes your nasal mucous much more runny and easier to blow out. Also remember that the object of decongestants is to dry up your nasal mucous, and what's left is usually pretty sticky stuff. You may want to reconsider taking that nighttime dose of cold medicine and substitute a big glass of water. There was one bit of good news from the study. The highest recorded pressures were during a sneeze with the mouth closed, even higher than with blowing. This means that a good loud sneeze is healthier than one of those wimpy quiet ones that I often hear at meetings or the movies. So even if I can't blow hard I at least I can still have the pleasure of a hearty sneeze.