

Vasomotor Rhinitis (Non-Allergic Rhinitis)

Vasomotor rhinitis is a condition in which the nose is overly reactive and overly sensitive to the environment. While this condition masquerades as an allergy, it is not. In fact, it is only diagnosed after allergy has been ruled out as a cause of the nasal symptoms. It is often triggered by irritants rather than allergies.

The name describes the condition: rhinitis is inflammation of the nose; vasomotor indicates that the normal nerve reflex ("motor") and regulation of the blood vessels ("vas") of the nose is impaired. Symptoms of vasomotor rhinitis occur due to over reactivity by the nose to many common things in the environment. Excessive mucus and nasal blockage result. Sometimes these symptoms are accompanied by symptoms of eye irritation or itching.

Vasomotor rhinitis is very common and occurs in children as well as adults. A major function of the nose is to provide warmth, moisture and filtration to the air we breathe and, thus, protect the lungs. This is accomplished through the mucous membrane linings in the nose.

Common Irritants:

The nose normally adjusts to many variations in the environment. For people with vasomotor rhinitis, this does not occur, and instead some of these environmental conditions act as irritants to the nasal membranes and trigger symptoms. These irritants may include all or some of the following:

- Extremes in temperature -- very hot or cold air
- Extremes in humidity -- very dry or moist air
- Strong odors
- Particulate irritants – pollution, smoke
- Hot, cold or spicy food
- Foods or beverages which affect blood vessels, e.g., alcoholic beverages
- Body position -- lying down commonly produces blockage
- Emotional factors to some extent

Associated Problems:

In many instances, the nasal congestion causes pressure in the head, especially in the areas surrounding the nose and eyes, and even headaches. It is not unusual to find an association of vasomotor rhinitis with cold extremities and occasionally with vascular ("migraine") headaches.

Management:

Vasomotor rhinitis can be extremely annoying and difficult to live with, although it has no serious complications. Treatment consists of:

- Avoiding and minimizing factors which contribute to symptoms
- Using appropriate medications (nasal steroids, azelastine, ipratropium bromide)
- Adding moisture to the nasal passages if dry air appears to contribute to symptoms, e.g., saline irrigations, olive oil, Ayr saline gel or a humidifier

Your provider will try to help you find out which irritants can and should be avoided, and which medications or combination of medications will work best to control your symptoms.