

The Allergy & Asthma Center

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Vasomotor (Idiopathic) Rhinitis

What is vasomotor rhinitis?

Vasomotor rhinitis is a runny nose that is not caused by an allergy or cold. Another name for this problem is idiopathic rhinitis.

How does it occur?

Vasomotor rhinitis is caused by tissue in the nose that is sensitive to changes in environmental conditions such as temperature, humidity, and the presence of irritants. Examples of irritants are smoke, dryness, smog, and perfume. In response to these conditions or irritants, the nose makes more mucus.

What are the symptoms?

The common symptom is a runny nose. Unlike allergic rhinitis, there is usually no itching or sneezing. You may have slight nasal congestion.

How is it diagnosed?

There is no specific test for the diagnosis of vasomotor rhinitis. Your health care provider reviews your medical and family history. The diagnosis is suspected from your history and when other possible causes of symptoms have been eliminated.

Your health care provider may swab the lining of your nose to obtain a sample of mucus. The mucus will be examined for the presence of allergy cells (eosinophils). These cells are rarely present in people who have vasomotor rhinitis. However, they are not always present in people whose rhinitis is caused by allergies, so the test is not always helpful.

How is it treated?

If treatment is necessary, nasal steroid or ipratropium sprays are usually effective. Use the spray according to the directions to prevent symptoms.

How long will the effects last?

The condition is usually lifelong. However, you may reduce the symptoms by avoiding the irritants in your environment that seem to cause problems for you.

What can be done to help prevent vasomotor rhinitis?

There is no known prevention.

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