

Does It Work?

Stuffiness Stoppers

BY LYNNA FLOYD

Let's face it—snot happens. But for a good reason: When your nose becomes irritated by a cold or flu virus, the blood vessels in your nasal cavity swell and your body secretes mucus in an attempt to flush out the culprits, explains Donald Ford, M.D., a family medicine physician with Cleveland Clinic. Unfortunately, this defense system can clog up your nostrils, making it a real challenge to breathe freely. There are plenty of remedies that claim to clear up stuffiness, but which ones really work?

DECONGESTANTS

WHAT THEY ARE: Pills and liquids that aim to alleviate nasal congestion with one of two active ingredients: pseudoephedrine (which is more effective, but sold behind the counter because it can be used to make illegal drugs) or phenylephrine (about half as effective, but easier to buy).

WHAT WE KNOW: “Decongestants work by shrinking the swollen capillaries in your nose,” explains Dr. Ford. A 2016 review of research found that continual use may improve congestion, but a single-dose drug won't do much at all.

SHOULD YOU TRY THEM? Yes, but be aware that side effects include restlessness and palpitations. “It's a weak stimulant, but it's still a stimulant,” says Rob Stroebel, M.D., an internal medicine physician at Mayo Clinic in Rochester, MN. “Take it during the day and switch to a nasal spray like Afrin by dinner; there's less absorption into the bloodstream, so you'll sleep better.” Decongestants constrict blood vessels, so if you have high blood pressure or another chronic illness, check with your doctor before using one.

BRANDS: Sudafed (from \$8), Mucinex Fast-Max Severe Congestion & Cough liquid (\$11), Sinex Severe nasal decongestant (\$12)



extra money to make the irrigation process easier, says Taz Bhatia, M.D., founder of Centre-Spring MD in Atlanta. “But clean it daily—if you don’t, you might flush mold into your sinus cavity and create more problems.”

BRANDS: Naväge Nose Cleaner kit (\$90)

EUCALYPTUS OIL

WHAT IT IS: A plant extract you can put into a diffuser or mix

into steaming water; natural healers say it clears out sinuses.

WHAT WE KNOW: While there’s no research supporting the oil’s decongestive properties, some experts say the cooling sensation it gives can soothe a raw nose and may help with congestion. “If I’m stuffed up, I like to boil a cup of water, add five to eight drops of eucalyptus oil, put a towel over my head, and inhale the steam,” says Dr. Bhatia.

SHOULD YOU TRY IT? Maybe—it might not help, but if you’re in search of a natural alternative, it won’t hurt.

BRANDS: Healing Solutions (\$5 for 0.34 fl. oz), Saje (\$15 for 0.34 fl. oz)

NAVÄGE NOSE CLEANER

WHAT IT IS: A high-tech update of a neti pot (a long-necked pot you fill with sterile or distilled water to pour through your nostrils). This one is battery-powered to provide gentle suction so you won’t have to bend over the sink.

WHAT WE KNOW: While there are no studies yet on this new device, research shows that nasal irrigation works.

“Used properly, neti pots have very few side effects,” says Dr. Stroebel, who points out that a simple nasal saline spray can also help a bit.

SHOULD YOU TRY IT? Sure, if you have chronic stuffiness and it’s worth the