

Ear, Nose & Throat Center of Austin

Karen L. Stierman, M.D.

Russell D. Briggs, M.D. F.A.C.S

102 Westlake Drive, Suite 103 ♦ Austin, TX 78746 ♦ Phone 512-328-7722 ♦ Fax 512-328-7724

Septoplasty

If you have a deviated septum in your nose (one that is bent or crooked), this surgery is for you. That piece of cartilage and bone that gives your nose its shape is a powerful part: if it's bent or irregular, it can cause pain and recurrent sinus infections, among other symptoms.

This surgery can be performed for a variety of reasons:

- To improve breathing. Septoplasty can be used to relieve nasal airway obstruction. The surgery can repair malformed cartilage and bony portion of your nose, allowing normal airflow.
- To relieve uncontrollable nosebleeds. You can also undergo a septoplasty to have a blood clot removed.
- As a secondary operation to a rhinoplasty (nose job). In this instance, a septoplasty is often performed because the rhinoplasty itself can reduce the breathing area in your nose.

It's important to remember that if you've had a nose injury, you may not be able to undergo septoplasty for at least six months after the injury.

Septoplasty can relieve nasal airway obstruction, which can force you to breathe by your mouth; it can also relieve sleep apnea and nagging nasal infections that are non-responsive to antibiotics. Septoplasty can also relieve uncontrollable nosebleeds.

How is a Septoplasty Done?

In your pre-surgery consultation, your surgeon will evaluate how air flows from each nostril in order to determine exactly how to handle your situation.

During the actual procedure, your surgeon will make an incision internally on one side of the nasal septum. He or she will lift the mucous membrane (mucosa) away from the bone, removing obstructive bone and cartilage. At times, your surgeon may also use splints to help support your nose during surgery.

You can undergo this surgery in a hospital or surgical facility with local or general anesthesia. If you are having the surgery to correct irregularities in the septum, or to improve breathing, you won't require much more surgery than this. However, if you have bony obstructions at the base of your nasal chamber, your surgery may be more extensive. You and your surgeon can discuss your expectations and determine how far you'd like to go for the desired results.

How Should I Prepare for a Septoplasty?

If you are employed, your surgeon may recommend that you take at least one week off from work after the surgery.

On the day of surgery, you should wear a loose button-down blouse or shirt; that is, one that does not need to be pulled over your head or face.

Your hospital stay will be determined by the extent of your operation. In most cases, you should be able to go home the same day. You should plan to have someone drive you home, and stay with you at least the first night, if you live alone. You should avoid certain medications before the procedure (such as aspirin), which can increase risk of excessive bleeding. Your surgeon will provide you with

specific instructions once you've detailed your medical history, conditions and medications that you take.

Depending on the type of anesthesia you'll have, your surgeon will provide you with specific pre-surgery instructions. For instance, if you are having general anesthesia (put to sleep), you should not eat or drink anything after midnight the day before or the morning of the procedure.

What Should I Expect After a Septoplasty?

Your surgeon will give you a prescription painkiller and a list of post-operative instructions. It's extremely important to follow these instructions very carefully to make sure your nose heals properly. Your doctor will pack your nose with dressings. Although your surgeon may remove this dressing before you leave the hospital, you may have to keep your nose packed for up to six days following the surgery. The only person who should remove this packing is your surgeon. Make sure you understand exactly how and why your surgeon packs your nose, and the follow-up care that is required to ensure proper treatment. If your surgeon has covered your nose with a splint, you can have this removed in just about one week. If you have internal stitches, these will dissolve; if you have external stitches, your surgeon will want to remove these in about one week.

What Are The Possible Complications or Side Effects of a Septoplasty?

- As with any surgery, there is always a risk of infection. Your surgeon may prescribe an antibiotic as a precaution.
- Some people can have an allergic reaction to the anesthesia. It's important that you discuss any drug allergies with your surgeon.
- You may experience numbness in different parts of your face, including your gums. This is normal.
- You will have facial swelling, and can soothe this with the ice packs.
- You may also have bruising.

When to Call a Doctor

- Fever
- Excessive bleeding
- Difficulty breathing

Does Insurance Cover a Septoplasty?

Insurance coverage for septoplasty will depend on two factors: the reason it's being done, and your insurance carrier. It's important that you call your insurance carrier and find out the details of your particular plan. Don't assume it's covered! If septoplasty is required to correct a medical problem (such as recurrent sinus infections or difficulty breathing), then your insurance carrier will most likely cover the procedure. Also, if you have to undergo septoplasty as a result of a nose injury, you will probably have insurance coverage. However, insurance plans do not provide coverage for elective cosmetic surgery. If you are undergoing a septoplasty for cosmetic purposes, make sure you understand all associated costs and what you are expected to pay.