What to do about
my child's nosebleeds

What causes nosebleeds in children? Nosebleeds in children are usually caused by irritation of the mucous membranes in the front part of the nose on the nasal septum, where bone and cartilage covered with mucous membranes divide the nose into two halves. Nosebleeds are most common in this part of the nose for several reasons. There are many blood vessels here, and this area is prone to dryness and crusting. Nose picking or other trauma, such as from nasal sprays, also affect this part of the nose the most. There are more serious medical causes for bleeding in children but they are extremely rare and can include: inherited bleeding disorders (such as hemophilia), acquired bleeding disorders, high blood pressure, tumors of the nose and inflammatory or autoimmune diseases of the nose.

Are nosebleeds dangerous? One of every seven people will have a nosebleed at some time; they are most common in children ages 2-10. In general, most nosebleeds result in very little blood loss. Chronic and recurrent nosebleeds over a long period of time can result in anemia (low blood count), but in general this is rare.

How do you stop nosebleeds? Since most nosebleeds are due to a rupture or break in the arteries on the inside front part of the nose, try to stop the bleeding at its source. Apply direct pressure to the area by pinching the nostrils closed for about 10 minutes while your child sits straight up with his or her head slightly forward. Don't tilt their head back or they could swallow blood. Hanging the head lower than the level of the heart may result in increased blood pressure to the head and prolonged bleeding. Gently blowing the nose every few minutes will clear clots from the nasal cavity that can prolong bleeding. Using nasal decongestants such as Afrin nasal spray, either applied directly or on a cotton ball, can help stop bleeding by constricting blood vessels. Ice packs applied externally to the nose can also help control bleeding by constricting blood vessels.

What can be done to control nosebleeds? Long-term control of nosebleeds means finding the root causes. Dryness and chronic infection of the front inside of the nose may result in irritation, which can cause bleeding. Application of antibiotic ointments, petroleum jelly, or steroid creams to the inside of the nostrils will help prevent crusting and moisturize the mucous membranes to allow healing. Treatment of nasal allergies and infections can also help reduce bleeding. Rarely, the doctor will have to seal (cauterize) nasal blood vessels to stop recurrent nosebleeds.