



Nasal turbinates

What are nasal turbinates?

Nasal turbinates are structures within the nose that function almost like an airplane wing, directing airflow through the nasal passages. Turbinates also humidify and filter the air we breathe. Part of how the turbinates function is known as the nasal cycle, a normal condition that causes turbinates to alternately shrink and swell every two to four hours. The nasal cycle is typically not noticeable unless other conditions exist such as a cold or nasal allergies.

When is there a problem?

When turbinates become swollen they may interfere with air movement through the nose, leading to stuffiness or congestion. Over time, the turbinates can become chronically swollen due to nasal allergies, recurrent nasal infections or in response to a deviated septum. Initial treatments for chronic congestion typically include the use of nasal steroid sprays and other allergy medications such as a montelukast (Singulair).

What is a turbinoplasty?

When treatments such as nasal sprays and antihistamines become ineffective in treating nasal congestion, a surgical procedure called a turbinoplasty may be recommended. A turbinoplasty involves trimming away the swollen tissue covering the lower-most (inferior) turbinates. The goal is to provide increased space for breathing through the nose. Usually done as day surgery, a turbinoplasty helps reduce nasal obstruction, congestion and snoring. Turbinoplasty is not a cure for allergies, but it can greatly reduce the symptoms from allergies, and the benefits are typically long lasting.