



Disclaimer: This leaflet provides general information and should not be used as a substitute for professional medical advice. It is essential to consult with a qualified healthcare professional for any health concerns or before making any decisions related to your health or treatment.

Overview

The nasal septum is the thin wall made of cartilage and bone that divides your nose into two separate nostrils. Ideally, the septum is straight and situated in the centre of the nose, allowing for equal airflow on both sides. However, in many individuals, the septum is not perfectly straight, deviating to one side or the other. This condition is known as a septal deviation.

A deviated septum can range from mild to severe. In mild cases, it may not cause any noticeable symptoms. However, a more severe deviation can obstruct airflow through one or both nostrils, leading to various nasal and sinus problems.

Symptoms and Causes

Symptoms

The symptoms of a deviated septum can vary depending on the severity of the deviation. Some common symptoms include:

- **Nasal obstruction:** Difficulty breathing through one or both nostrils. This is often worse on the side of the deviation.
- **Frequent nosebleeds:** The deviated septum can make the nasal lining dry and more susceptible to bleeding.
- **Facial pain:** Pressure or pain around the nose and cheeks, sometimes extending to the forehead or ears.
- **Headaches:** Due to sinus pressure and congestion.
- **Snoring:** Obstructed nasal passages can contribute to snoring.
- **Sleep apnoea:** In severe cases, a deviated septum can cause or worsen obstructive sleep apnoea.
- **Postnasal drip:** The feeling of mucus dripping down the back of the throat.
- **Recurrent sinus infections:** The deviated septum can interfere with sinus drainage, increasing the risk of infections.
- **Whistling sound while breathing:** Especially noticeable during sleep.
- **Crusting or dryness inside the nose:** Due to altered airflow patterns.
- **Difficulty smelling or tasting:** Obstructed nasal passages can impair the sense of smell and, consequently, taste.

Causes

A deviated septum can be caused by various factors, including:

- **Developmental issues:** The septum may deviate during foetal development or early childhood.
- **Trauma:** Injury to the nose, such as a broken nose or facial trauma, can cause the septum to deviate.
- **Ageing:** The cartilage in the septum can weaken and shift with age.

Diagnosis and Investigations

Diagnosing a deviated septum usually involves a physical examination of your nose by an ENT (ear, nose, and throat) specialist. The doctor will use a nasal speculum, a small instrument that gently widens the nostrils, to visualize the septum and nasal passages.

Additional investigations may be performed to assess the extent of the deviation and its impact on your nasal and sinus health:

- **Nasal endoscopy:** A thin, flexible tube with a camera is inserted into the nose to provide a detailed view of the septum, turbinates (small structures inside the nose), and sinus openings.
- **CT scan:** A computed tomography scan can provide detailed images of the nasal cavity, sinuses, and surrounding structures, helping to identify any other anatomical abnormalities.

Management and Treatment

Non-surgical Management

For mild deviations that don't cause significant symptoms, non-surgical treatments may be sufficient:

- **Nasal decongestants:** These medications can temporarily relieve nasal congestion but shouldn't be used long-term due to the risk of rebound congestion.
- **Saline nasal spray:** Helps to moisten the nasal passages and clear mucus.
- **Antihistamines:** May be helpful for individuals with allergies contributing to nasal symptoms.
- **Nasal corticosteroids:** Can reduce inflammation in the nasal passages, relieving congestion and other allergy-related symptoms.

Surgical Management

If the deviation is severe and causes significant nasal obstruction or other problems, surgery may be recommended. The most common surgical procedure for septal deviation is called septoplasty:

- **Septoplasty:** This procedure aims to straighten the septum and improve airflow. It is usually performed under general or local anaesthesia. During the surgery, the surgeon makes an incision inside the nose, lifts the lining of the septum, reshapes or removes the deviated cartilage and bone, and then repositions the lining.

Prevention

Preventing a deviated septum caused by developmental issues or ageing may not be possible. However, you can reduce the risk of trauma-induced deviations by:

- **Wearing protective gear:** When participating in contact sports or activities that increase the risk of facial injury.
- **Seeking prompt medical attention:** For any nasal injuries to ensure proper diagnosis and treatment.

Outlook / Prognosis

The outlook for individuals with septal deviation is generally very good. Non-surgical treatments can effectively manage mild deviations, while septoplasty is usually very successful in relieving symptoms and improving nasal airflow in more severe cases. Recovery from septoplasty typically takes a few weeks, and most people experience significant improvement in their nasal breathing.