

Chronic Nasal Obstruction and Allergic Rhinitis

Chronic nasal obstruction is a frequent symptom of seasonal **allergic rhinitis** (hay fever) and perennial (year-round) allergic rhinitis, which occurs when an individual is exposed to allergens such as molds, pollens or animal dander. For some people, allergic rhinitis is nothing more than a nuisance, but for others it can lead to chronic nasal obstruction and be a debilitating condition that significantly detracts from the quality of their work and recreational lives.

The nasal turbinates are small, shelf-like, bony structures covered by mucous membranes (mucosa). The turbinates protrude into the nasal airway and help to warm, humidify and cleanse air as it is inhaled and before it reaches the lungs. When exposed to allergens, irritants, or certain drugs, the mucosa can become inflamed. The blood vessels inside the membrane swell and expand, causing the turbinates to become enlarged and obstruct the flow of air through the nose. This inflammation, or rhinitis, can cause chronic nasal obstruction that affects individuals during the day and night.

Enlarged turbinates and nasal congestion can also contribute to headaches and sleep disorders such as snoring and obstructive sleep apnea, as the nasal airway is the normal breathing route during sleep. Once turbinate enlargement becomes chronic, it is irreversible except with surgical intervention.

Estimates of the number of Americans who suffer from allergic rhinitis vary from 14 million to 26 million people to 30% of the population. However, many people mislabel their allergy symptoms as persistent colds or sinus problems and allergic rhinitis is probably underdiagnosed.

Treating Chronic Nasal Obstruction Associated with Allergic Rhinitis

Many patients suffering from Chronic Nasal Obstruction associated with allergic rhinitis are now benefiting from a minimally invasive treatment called **Somnoplasty**. Somnoplasty uses low-energy radiofrequency energy to create lesions in the area of nasal obstruction (the soft palate or nasal turbinates). As the lesions are naturally resorbed, tissue volume is reduced and the remaining tissue becomes stiffened. This minimally invasive, office-based procedure is highly effective, relatively painless and has very few adverse effects. Patients with nasal obstruction can expect improved breathing and decreased nasal obstruction during the day and night (quieting habitual snoring).