

Ask The Experts

Dark brown nasal discharge not normal

Q I am a 71-year-old woman. A few months ago, I had a bout of flu and I had lots of nasal discharge.

This, of course, was not unusual.

But I noticed that not only was the nasal discharge copious, it was also thick and very dark brown in colour.

My taste buds were affected and so was my appetite.

As it was the first time I had such nasal discharge, I thought it was due to the seriousness of the flu and so I did not do anything about it.

But recently, I had a slight cold and the same copious, thick and dark brown discharge appeared again.

Other than the nasal discharge, I did not feel any discomfort or pain.

This time round, my taste buds and appetite were not affected either.

Why was the nasal discharge dark brown on both occasions?

I wonder if there is more to it than meets the eye.

Do I need to see a specialist?



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A Dark brown nasal discharge is not normal. It may be a sign that there is bleeding in the nose or sinuses, which are the hollow cavities inside the nose.

This can occur if you blow your nose too hard while having a cold or influenza, causing the blood vessels in the lining of the nose to break.

The lining of the nose is more fragile than usual when you are having a cold or flu.

If you think this may be the problem in your case, the first thing to do is to avoid blowing your nose excessively.

Discomfort or pain does not necessarily accompany a cold even if there is bleeding.

Loss of taste and appetite can often accompany the flu and should go away once you recover.

The important thing is that if the dark brown discharge keeps recurring, you should consult an ear, nose and throat (ENT) specialist.

The specialist will be able to check your nose for the cause and to rule out something more serious than bleeding from blowing your nose excessively, such as a growth in the nose.

The specialist will need to do nasal endoscopy, which involves examining the inside of the nose using a thin flexible telescope. The examination is usually painless.



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