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## OKAY, SO EVERYONE PICKS THEIR NOSE—HERE'S WHAT A DOC HAS TO SAY ABOUT IT



My colleague asked the Well+Good editorial team the other day if we pick our noses—and she was met with a resounding yes. I was shook that people were owning up to it, TBH—isn't picking your nose something you're told to *stop* doing at like, age 2?

Alas, it seems as though people are still digging for nose gold on the reg long after their preschool graduation. (I will neither confirm nor deny my own possible nose-picking activities.) So...since you're probably just going to wind up doing it anyway, I decided to ask a professional about the dos and don'ts of picking your nose.

Like pimple popping, nose picking is certainly not doctor-recommended. However, there's a silver lining for nostril gold miners: "Nose picking is rarely the cause of any serious problems in healthy individuals," says Niket Sonpal, MD, a board-certified internist and gastroenterologist based in New York City.

Picking your nose actually does serve a purpose...kind of. Your snot is basically "a product of all the crap that you breathe in," Dr. Sonpal says—including dust and germs. "If you don't clean out boogers by blowing or picking, the dried out mucus that moved to the front of the nose can make its way back toward the back of the nasal passage and down the throat." (Gulp.) So, yes, it's okay to enjoy a dig every now and then.

"Nose picking could be leaving the door open for dangerous bacteria that want to call your nose home." —Niket Sonpal, MD

However, the habit could be problematic if you have a weaker immune system, Dr. Sonpal adds. That's because while it's not necessarily bad for you, it's "not exactly a healthy habit," says Dr. Sonpal. "As you mine for nose gold, your fingernails cause tiny abrasions in your nasal cavity." (Yes, he really did say "mine for nose gold.") Those abrasions create openings in your skin, which "could be leaving the door open for dangerous bacteria that want to call your nose home," he says. He adds that a study from Cambridge University found nose pickers are significantly more likely to carry *Staphylococcus aureus* (also known as "staph," a bacteria that is the leading cause of skin and soft tissue infections.) Eek.

Another unpleasant byproduct of shoving your fingers into your schnoz: nosebleeds. "Nose bleeding commonly occurs due to picking your nose, more so in children," says Dr. Sonpal. "The picking can break the blood vessels, and fingernails can scratch and cause cuts in the nasal passages."

In a worst-case scenario, the most hardcore nose spelunkers can really mess up their septum (the bone and cartilage in the center of your nose that separates your left and right nostrils). "If you consistently pick your nose, you can damage your septum, which may result in a hole," Dr. Sonpal says. "This can have several unwanted side effects, such as the formation of a crust around the nose and a whistling sound when you breathe." Fun!

So what's a snotty girl to do if nose picking has so many potential downsides? Besides reaching for a tissue, "a nasal wash is a way to clean the nasal passages and sinus cavities," says Dr. Sonpal. Basically, you shoot a prepared saline rinse up your nose to literally wash away all your problematic snot. Gross but certainly effective—and you can get a kit at Target for \$11.

If boogers are just overtaking your life, Dr. Sonpal suggests some lifestyle tweaks to help cut back on future snot formation. “Keep the humidity in your home at 55 percent, avoid carpets so you reduce contact with allergens, clean your home regularly so you don’t let dust accumulate, and avoid smoking and second-hand smoke,” says Dr. Sonpal. All of these factors help keep your nose’s snot production levels normal and not like, booger central. “Maintain a daily nasal cleansing routine with a saline solution,” he adds.

Or, just keep up with the occasional picking. Just don’t, ahem, eat what you dig up, okay?

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