

BREATHING AND NASAL DIFFICULTIES

A very common problem is poor nasal airflow. Nasal obstruction is often due to a deviated septum, which is the wall between the left and right side. Also in the nose are turbinates, which are tissues that project from the sides and serve as air filters and humidifiers. The air that reaches the back of the nose is cleaned and humidified before going to the lungs. When the nose gets congested, it is the turbinates that swell and if the septum is deviated, that side gets blocked.

Septoplasty is a common procedure done to improve nasal breathing. It is typically done in conjunction with an endoscopic turbinate reduction for maximum benefit.

A septoplasty involves straightening the septum by removing spurs or bends in the cartilage. The incision is small and is inside the nose. There are no external incisions or signs that anything was done. No swelling or bruising. Septoplasty does not change the shape of the nose although that can also be done if desired at the same time. After the procedure, soft, rubbery splints are placed in the nose to hold the tissues together while they heal. These slide out easily in the office about five days later. There is NO packing, which can be painful and is the reason that people hear bad stories about the procedure. With splints, many people only need Tylenol for pain. Most people take those five days off from work although it is usually possible to return to work as early as day two or three.

The turbinate reduction involves shrinking down the tissues to reduce how much they can swell and provide more room in the nose. It is much like liposuction. Some of the tissue is removed with a little wand while preserving the turbinate so it can still function. An analogy would be like turning a grape into a raisin. It is not a painful procedure and they often heal in about a week. Turbinate reduction alone may result in some mild bleeding for a day or two. People tend to return to work by day three.