Saline irrigation: a cheap and effective treatment for allergic rhinitis

Vanessa Jordan PhD


**THE PROBLEM:** Allergic rhinitis is estimated to affect 17–20% of the general population. It is characterised by nasal congestion, nasal itching and sneezing and is often associated with particular seasons. Saline irrigation is thought to remove some of the allergens that contribute to allergic rhinitis as well as improve the function of the nasal cavity by removing mucus and therefore improving ciliary beat function.

**CLINICAL BOTTOM LINE:** This Cochrane review showed that people who suffer from allergic rhinitis benefitted from using saline irrigation both in the short and long-term. No adverse effects were reportedly associated with the use of saline irrigation but it is unclear how competently the studies carried out this assessment. There was no evidence to suggest that saline irrigation was less effective than nasal corticosteroids or antihistamines but this may have been due to a lack of available evidence.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome measured</th>
<th>Success</th>
<th>Evidence</th>
<th>Harms</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disease severity at 4 weeks</td>
<td>Overall low quality evidence showed using nasal saline irrigation comparative to no irrigation would reduce disease severity by 1.97 points (1.21 to 2.74) on a 10 point VAS</td>
<td>This was based on 6 studies including 322 children and 85 adults. No harms with respect to saline irrigation were identified.</td>
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<td>Disease severity score at 4 weeks to 6 months</td>
<td>Overall low quality evidence showed using nasal saline irrigation comparative to no irrigation would reduce disease severity by 2.98 points (0.99 to 5.98) on a 10 point VAS for nasal symptoms over the longer term</td>
<td>This was based on 5 studies including 102 children and 65 adults.</td>
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References


All people residing in New Zealand have access to the Cochrane Library via the Ministry website www.health.govt.nz/cochrane-library