Flexible Nasal Endoscopy

What is a flexible nasal endoscopy?

Flexible nasal endoscopy is a procedure that is used to look inside the nose, back of the nose, voice box and back of the throat and tongue. An endoscope is a type of flexible telescope.

It is a very common procedure that is performed in the outpatients' clinic, ward or emergency department.

Why do I need the procedure?

Anyone who has a problem with the ear, nose, throat or voice box may need to have this procedure.

About the procedure

The endoscope is a narrow, flexible telescope with a bright light. In a standard fiberoptic endoscope, the image is transmitted through lots of very fine glass fibres to an eyepiece or camera. Sometimes a videocamera is sited at the end of the endoscope and the picture is displayed on a screen.

The endoscope is passed through the nostril and allows us to examine the inside and back of your nose, back of the tongue, throat and/or voice box whilst you are awake. Looking at these areas helps us make a diagnosis. The person passing the telescope may ask you to swallow or breathe through your nose.

You can breathe in and out through your nose and mouth during the procedure. You may be asked to say some words, noises or sentences out loud. You may be asked to puff out your cheeks.

The procedure usually only lasts a few minutes and can be performed with or without local anaesthetic. The sensation in the nose and throat can take an hour to return to normal if local anaesthetic is used. During this time you cannot eat or drink until the sensation returns. Some people find the loss of sensation very uncomfortable as they feel like they cannot breathe or swallow saliva.

Alternatives

A rigid telescope can be used to examine the nose and back of the nose.

Risks

Flexible endoscopy is a very safe procedure for both children and adults. In children the procedure may trigger breathe-holding attacks so the procedure should be performed in an environment with nursing staff and equipment to help with breathing.

The nose may be uncomfortable and you may feel the sensation of something in your throat. The procedure may cause your eyes to water. The procedure may trigger a cough. Occasionally, patients may experience a nose bleed after the procedure.

Flexible nasendoscopy has the potential to produce airborne aerosols and droplets should you sneeze or cough during the procedure. You may be asked to wear a mask during the procedure to catch any aerosols and droplets should they occur.

If local anaesthetic is used, it may be put in to your nose 10 minutes before the procedure.

The doctor or nurse performing the procedure will be wearing Personal Protective Equipment.

Frequently Asked Questions

Am I awake during the procedure?

Yes.

Can I drive after the test?

Yes.

How long does it take?

Less than one minute is common, though the procedure may take longer (especially during the COVID-19 pandemic).

Will I need any medication?

The telescope is covered in water-based lubricant, which allows the telescope to slide more easily past tight areas. A local anaesthetic and/or decongestant spray maybe used.

Will I feel the telescope?

You will usually feel the telescope sliding in. You may feel the telescope at some points of the procedure even if an anaesthetic spray is used.

Will I be able to see what is happening?

Some units may have a screen which you may be able watch during or afterwards if this facility is available.

Can I eat and drink before the procedure?

Yes.

Can I eat and drink after the procedure?

If a nose or throat spray has been used you should not eat or drink for about 20 minutes to an hour (or until your nose and throat feel normal again). You will be told if you cannot eat and drink after the procedure.