Dear Alice,

I am a 16-year-old girl who isn't very good at blowing her nose. I can blow the air down hard enough, but nobody has ever taught me a good technique for a proper clear-out. What is the best way to hold your nose in the tissue to get a really good nose-blow? How would you recommend I try to blow my nose?

Answer

Dear Reader,

Nose-blowing can be tough, especially if you have not been provided the proper training. The first step in Nose Blowing 101 is to learn about the stuff that's coming from your nose. Enter: Mucus. This substance, otherwise known as snot, is slimy and sticky, but also helps to protect the lungs by catching tiny particles like dirt and germs that you would otherwise breathe in. You have likely noticed increased levels of mucus when you are sick. Once the dirt and particles get caught inside the nose, the mucus and cilia (tiny hairs inside of the nose) surround it and move the stuff to the bottom of the nose or the back of the throat. When the mucus dries with the dirt particles, a booger is created. Resist the urge to pick it that can cause irritation and may lead to bleeding. Instead, experienced nasal expectorators suggest these nose-blowing nuggets:

- Choose tissues over washable handkerchiefs? used hankies wadded-up in your pocket provide a breeding ground for bacteria.
- Take a deep breath (through your mouth) before you blow your nose.
- Keep your mouth slightly open when you're ready to let loose. This can help prevent damage to your ear drums.
- Blow out little, gentle puffs, as opposed to hair-raising honks, which should also spare your nostrils, Eustachian tubes, and ear drums from a harmful beating.
- Close your eyes to make nose-blowing a more comfortable experience.
- Block one nostril while evacuating the other, and then trade as needed.
- Inhale steam or take a shower before blowing your nose, facilitating "clean-out" by loosening those tough clogs.
- Wipe your nose to make sure nothing else is hanging around when all's been cleared.
Reducing your risk of catching a cold may be one way to eliminate the need to blow your nose in the first place. Also wash your hands frequently, get enough sleep, take steps to reduce stress, and manage your allergies and hay fever, if you have any.

Alice!
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