

Surgery to straighten a deviated septum improves quality of life

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Surgery to straighten a deviated nasal septum, also known as septoplasty, is worthwhile. Patients with a deviated (crooked) septum breathe more easily after this operation and their quality of life improves. The effects

of this procedure have never been systematically investigated. Specialists have long debated its benefits. But now, researchers at Radboud University medical center have ended the controversy on June 18 with a publication in *The Lancet*.

The septum divides the nose into two halves. If the septum is deviated, various complaints can occur, such as chronic nasal obstruction, difficulty in breathing, or snoring. These complaints are so common that septoplasty is the most frequently performed ENT operation in adults. However, the effectiveness of this treatment has never been systematically investigated with a control group. As a result, the benefits of septoplasty have long been debated amongst healthcare professionals and policy makers. In England, the discussion even led to restrictions for the reimbursement of this procedure.

Radboud University Medical Center researchers Machteld van Egmond, Maroeska Rovers, and Niels van Heerbeek are the first to compare the outcomes of two groups of patients following different treatment strategies: septoplasty and non-surgical management, that is medication or watchful waiting. Machteld van Egmond, lead researcher for the project: "This procedure has been performed for many years, but in previous studies only surgical patients were assessed. Without a control group, you never know whether an observed improvement is actually the result of the intervention, or due to other factors, such as the natural course of the condition."

The researchers investigated the effect of septoplasty in more than 200 adults with nasal obstruction and a deviated [septum](#). The study was performed in two academic medical centers and 16 secondary referral hospitals in the Netherlands. Half of the patients underwent septoplasty (surgical group), and the other half non-surgical management (control group). The researchers then measured the effects of both treatment strategies on patients' quality of life and airflow through the nose. These

measurements were performed at 3, 6, 12, and 24 months after the start of the treatment.

The quality of life of the surgical group had already improved at three months. They experienced fewer limitations in daily life due to nasal problems. Nasal airflow also increased after the operation. This [positive effect](#) was still present after two years. The [patients](#) had fewer nasal symptoms, fewer colds, breathed more easily, and slept better. All the effects were largest at six months after the operation, but persisted until the end of the study.

More information: Fabian Sommer et al. Septoplasty—a surgical or political challenge?, *The Lancet* (2019). [DOI: 10.1016/S0140-6736\(19\)31241-3](#)

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