

The prevalence of preferential nasal breathing in adults.

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Abstract

The prevalence of preferential nasal breathing was studied in an awake adult population. One hundred and ninety-four people consented to gentle manual compression of the nostrils. They were advised to 'breathe in and out', but no further information regarding breathing was given to avoid influencing the patient. One hundred and eighty patients (92.8%) commenced immediate regular relaxed breathing. Fourteen patients (7.2%) had difficulty with oral breathing which ranged from irregular mouth breathing associated with distress to no spontaneous respiration. The prevalence of preferential nasal breathing was strongly associated with increasing age (chi 2 for trend, $P = 0.007$). In addition, a weakly significant association was demonstrated between a history of asthma and this phenomenon ($P = 0.047$). These findings suggest a tendency for the elderly person to revert to the infant pattern of obligate nasal breathing. Physicians should be aware of this possibility in the elderly patient, especially prior to any procedure which may induce nasal obstruction.