

Breathe Easier: Open up those nostrils

A Guide to Nasal Strips and Nasal Dilators

As the saying goes “Practice what you preach”. Although I’ve spent years measuring people’s lung function and assessing their breathing patterns I haven’t explored the benefits of opening up your nostrils by using nasal strips or dilators. These can be used at rest, on exercise and when sleeping. So, here is my recent experience of trying out three different products at rest.

Firstly you need to see what we’re working with (I hadn’t realised how narrow my nostrils were until I took this photo!):



1. Nasal Strips

Nasal strips are perhaps the most familiar option. These adhesive strips are applied to the outside of your nose.

How They Work

Nasal strips are made with a flexible band embedded in a sticky material. Once applied, the band tries to straighten out, lifting and widening the sides of your nose. This action opens up your nasal passages externally, reducing resistance to airflow.



Initial thoughts

I instantly felt the benefits of these, the ease of breathing was really notable. I soon got used to the feeling of them on my nose and forgot they were there. They are very sticky so taking them off was a bit uncomfortable but they didn't leave any marks on my nose.

Pros:

- Easy to use.
- Come in different sizes.
- Safe for most people (although mine had a latex allergy warning on them).
- External and non-invasive.
- Affordable and widely available.

Cons:

- Adhesive may irritate sensitive skin.
- Very sticky to get off.
- Quite obvious.

2. Magnetic Nasal Strips

Magnetic nasal dilators are external devices similar in appearance to nasal strips but you put two sticky magnets on the side of your nose and use a band across to pull your nostrils open.

How They Work

Like standard nasal strips, magnetic nasal dilators physically lift the nasal passages from the outside.



Initial thoughts

It was difficult to put the sticky magnets in the right position and then none of the four bands that came in the set seemed to fit. The bands are quite stiff so I gently bent the smallest one so that it would connect to the magnets. I played around for quite a while with these to try and get the best fit but didn't feel that they were giving me the best results. It might be that a different brand would be better.

Pros:

- External and non-invasive.
- Come in different sizes.
- Bands are reusable.
- Easy to remove.

Cons:

- Fiddily to put on.
- Didn't feel the same pulling open sensation.
- Bulkier and more obvious than standard nasal strips.

3. Internal Nasal Dilators

Internal nasal dilators work by being placed inside the nostrils to help physically widen the nasal airways. They are often made of medical-grade silicone or plastic and come in various shapes and sizes.

How They Work

By gently pushing outward on the nasal walls from the inside, internal dilators reduce resistance to airflow, especially in people with narrow nasal openings or soft nasal cartilage.

These came in two different sizes: Small (blue) and Medium (orange) both 2.7 cm in length.



Initial thoughts

I thought that I was going to hate these! “How on earth can sticking something up your nose help you breathe more easily” I thought, however once I had them placed correctly (you need a mirror to do this to start) I was still aware of having them in but could feel the benefit they were providing. In my case I couldn’t really tell the difference between using the two sizes.

Pros:

- Mostly hidden when in use.
- Come in different sizes
- Reusable and durable.

Cons:

- May feel uncomfortable.
- Needs cleaning after each use.
- Could be difficult to fit correctly for some users.

Final Thoughts

I cannot believe what a difference these make to how easy it is to breathe, I really noticed a difference when I took them off at how much resistance there was to the airflow. Of the three types I tried, the nasal strips were definitely my favourite. They were easy to put on and I felt they provided me with the most benefit.

These devices might not be for everyone but I would recommend giving them a go. Remember if you experience persistent nasal obstruction even after trying all the non-invasive strategies I recommend to improve this then you should consult a doctor to check for a deviated septum or nasal polyps.

Here are the products I used but there are lots of different ones available:

