

# SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

Contact: Kris Mullen  
214-648-3404  
e-mail: kmulle@mednet.swmed.edu

## PHYSICIANS MAKE WAVES WITH NEW TOOL TO DIAGNOSE NASAL OBSTRUCTION

DALLAS — March 27, 1997 — A new diagnostic technique that produces an accurate and detailed map of nasal passages allows physicians at UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas to determine the best treatment for a common problem: a stuffy nose.

Ear, nose and throat specialists in UT Southwestern's Department of Otorhinolaryngology have begun using the only Acoustic Rhinometry System in North Texas to evaluate patients who have difficulty breathing because of nasal blockage.

"The rhinometer is a painless way to help us determine more quickly and accurately than before the degree and cause of nasal obstruction," said Dr. Richard Mabry, a UT Southwestern professor of otorhinolaryngology who specializes in treatment of allergies and nose problems. "It is a tool that saves us from wasting time because it immediately identifies whether medical treatment appears likely to work or whether surgery is needed."

Physicians traditionally have relied on a physical examination and the patient's medical history to determine the cause of nasal obstruction and the best treatment.

A normal nose has two narrow areas, but infections, allergies and structural deformities often cause obstruction elsewhere. These structural and mucosal problems can be more than a nuisance; they can cause discomfort that interferes with a normal lifestyle.

Acoustic rhinometry, which Mabry describes as an ultrasound exam of the nose, is fast and painless. A computer sends sound waves into the nose via a tube placed at the nostril. A microphone picks up the reflected waves and the computer plots the topography of a cross-section of the nose. Within seconds the computer screen lights up with a graph showing the dips and peaks of normal and narrow passages.

"This helps pinpoint the location of the blockage," Mabry said. "It gives us a quantitative measure of the degree of obstruction and often brings to light additional

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problems that might otherwise be missed."

Nasal obstruction may have one or a combination of causes.

"We strive to make patients better and keep them better," Mabry said. "For people with chronic nasal congestion, we can offer a comprehensive treatment plan once we know the cause or causes."

Many people suffer from nasal congestion caused by chronic sinus infections. In some cases, patients develop fleshy growths, called polyps, that block air passages in the nose. Structural deformities of the nasal septum — the cartilage and bone that separates the nose into two sides — commonly cause breathing problems. These deformities usually are caused by injury. The American Academy of Otolaryngology - Head and Neck Surgery reports nasal injuries occur in 7 percent of births, and the nose is an easy target for further injury throughout a lifetime.

When medication will not relieve the obstruction and surgery is needed, insurance companies often require a second physician's opinion. Mabry said using the rhinometer may eliminate that need because it documents the degree and source of obstruction.

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