

## ~ INQUIRY ~

*Giving Your Nose a Wash*

Sinus infection has been identified by the National Center for Health Statistics as the worst chronic ailment in the United States. Thirty-three million Americans suffer from sinus disease each year, with a hefty \$1.5 billion a year spent on over-the-counter drugs. Because the nose is the gateway to the respiratory system it is important that these passages be kept clean and clear to prevent such problems as sinus congestion, inflammation, infection, headaches, sore throats, and damage to the lungs. For over a century, physicians used saline rinses to cleanse the nasal passages of infectious debris. Regrettably, the advent and popularization of expensive medications to treat nasal problems has superceded this procedure; an unfortunate development because it has overshadowed a simple, cheap, and quick method that can prevent problems from arising in the first place. What the physicians of our forefathers knew is now being backed by several clinical studies that support nasal irrigation in the treatment of rhinitis (inflammation of the nose) and sinusitis (inflammation of the sinuses).

Just as you use your toothbrush daily to keep your teeth and gums clean and healthy, you can irrigate your nasal passages to protect yourself from sinusitis, colds, flu, and allergies. The mild saline cleans the passages of foreign particles, keeps the mucous blanket in the nose healthy, and stimulates the tissue to become a little tougher and thus more resistant to penetration by harmful bacteria. One proponent of nasal irrigation, Dr. David Kuhns, says that nasal washing feels "like walking along a beach and breathing salt air. It's thoroughly pleasant and, afterward, you can breathe very clearly."<sup>10</sup> Unfortunately, Westerners find the idea of pouring water into the nose as repulsive as the idea of having an enema in a public place. I think this is because people wrongly associate a nasal wash with the unpleasant sensation of getting water up their nose in a swimming pool, with that electric buzz in the top of the head we all remember as children. That only happens if you pour water into the upper sinuses—an easily preventable mistake. After nine months of chronic sinus infections, I personally

\* found this a very effective remedy and now make it part of my daily routine. When I travel in polluted cities, I am also amazed at how much black dust and pollution is expelled during a nasal wash, or *neti* as the yogis call it, even when

Note: other sources suggest that daily neti may be too much. If starting a neti practice seek further guidance on recommended frequency from an experienced yoga teacher or your doctor.

the wash is done after vigorously blowing the nose. A nasal wash also feels wonderfully cleansing after being in a dusty environment. And it is very easy to do.

The nasal wash is usually done with a tiny porcelain or metal teapot called a *neti* pot. You can purchase them at India food supply stores, Ayurvedic clinics, or through mail order (see Resources for suppliers of *neti* pots). Fill the pot with lukewarm tap water and add a good pinch (about ¼ tsp.) of non-iodized salt. Using the mirror above your sink for guidance, put the spout into one nostril and tip the head slightly to one side. Do not try to assist the flow of water by inhaling through your nostrils. Just let the water flow while breathing through your mouth. If fluid flows into the back of your throat simply spit it out. The water will flow up and out the other nostril.

When there is heavy congestion it may impede the irrigating process, but repeated use will gradually loosen the blockage. Experiment with tipping your head sideways and slightly forwards until the water finds its way up and out the other nostril. It shouldn't go all the way into the upper chambers of your turbinates or it will cause an unpleasant tingling sensation in the top of the head. If this happens you are tipping your head too far backward. It may take a little experimentation to get just the right angle so don't worry if you don't get it just right the first time. After you have emptied the *neti* pot, pause and blow out freely through both nostrils into the sink. Don't close both nostrils or you may blow the water back into the Eustachian tubes of your ear. Make a new batch of water and salt and do the other side, finishing by blowing out any remaining water into the sink. If necessary blow very gently into a tissue without pinching the nostrils closed to expel the last drops of water.

Once you get the knack, *neti* only takes a minute to do, and will leave your nose open, your breathing free, and your mind feeling clear and alert.

You can do a *neti* wash before trying some of the more advanced breathing exercises in later chapters. It is particularly effective to do a wash before practicing alternate nostril breathing in chapter 6.

## Your Lungs and Your Rib Cage

Surrounded by the protective armoring of the ribs and breastbone your lungs live inside your chest, peaking about an inch or so over the tops of your collarbones in the front and extending as far down as your tenth thoracic vertebrae in the back. If you stand and put your hands on the back about 4 inches above your

\* Note:  
generally tap  
water is not  
recommended  
unless it has  
been boiled &  
cooled to tepid/  
body temp.  
Alternatively  
use distilled  
water.