

Is your nose the weak link in your workout? (nasal obstruction)

Nasal symptoms affect 70% of athletes against 52% of non-athletes. A nose that gives out before the legs do switches the patient to mouth breathing, and the airways, sleep and recovery pay for it. How exercise loads the nasal valve, three quick checks, the causes, and the timing of each fix.

Saiyed Abdal · 15 Oct 2026 · Frido Care Academy

CLINICAL SUMMARY

What it is	Exercise shrinks the nasal lining (resistance falls by about half), but faster airflow drops the pressure at the nasal valve and draws a soft lateral wall inward. If the walls give way, the patient switches to mouth breathing at an easy pace.
How common	Nasal symptoms in 70% of athletes against 52% of non-athletes; rhinitis in 21–74% of athletes against 20–25%; non-allergic rhinitis in 45% of elite swimmers.
What it costs	Not peak aerobic performance (unchanged with the nose clipped), but unfiltered, cold, dry air, more exercise-induced airway narrowing in those prone to it, and worse sleep and recovery.
Assess	Training history, the lateral walls on a hard sniff, the cheek pull, and nasal airflow with and without a dilator. A 0–10 weekly rating of 5 or more means act; still 5 or more after 7 days of treatment means refer.
First line	Timing: warm up close to the start, hold the walls open during, rinse and treat the lining every day, fix the frame in the off-season. Decongestants for 5 days at most; check pseudoephedrine before competition.
Refer	Urgently for a swelling inside the nose after a knock (septal haematoma); set a broken nose within 7 days. Cough, wheeze or chest tightness with exercise points to the chest.

TRAINING ADJUNCT

Frido Nasal Strip Pro ₹499 ~~₹1,000~~

Nasal Strips for rest days, travel or a cold, when it shouldn't show. Holds the side walls open on hard breaths while worn. It won't treat the lining or make anyone fitter or faster.



Patient view

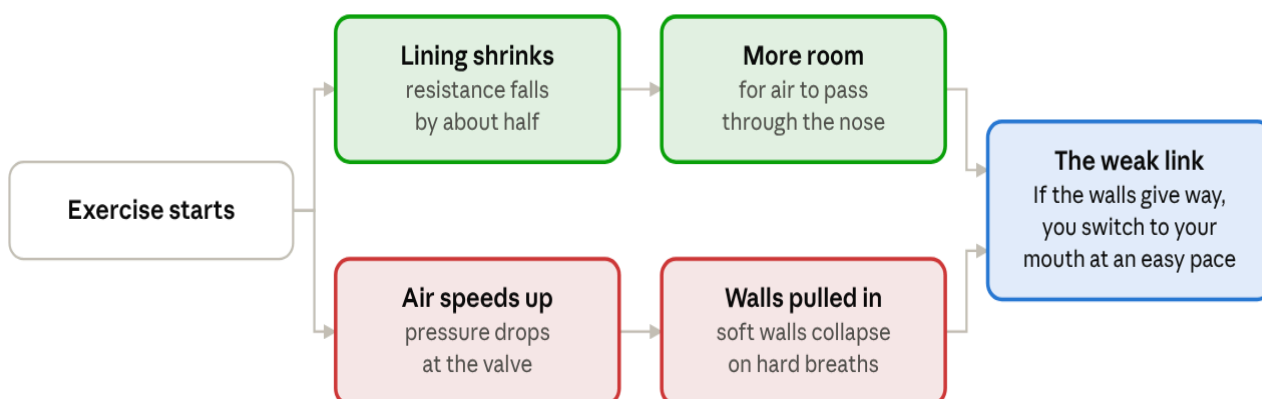
Scan to open, or send it to your patient: the 1:47 video, home plan and safety-net in plain words.

01 What happens to the nose during exercise

Exercise opens one part of the nose and squeezes another. The lining shrinks, cutting nasal resistance by about half after hard exercise ([Strohl 1988](#)). But faster air drops the pressure at the nasal valve, the narrow slit just inside the nostrils, and sucks its soft side walls inward ([McIntosh 2021](#); [Bloching 2008](#)).

Exercise opens the lining but pulls soft side walls in

What happens at the nasal valve as you speed up



Exercise and the nasal valve: two effects, one weak link. The side walls decide whether the nose keeps up.

Most people breathe through the nose alone up to a moderate effort, about 35 litres of air a minute, then add the mouth, which is normal at hard efforts ([Bergqvist 2025](#), citing [Niinimaa 1980](#); [McIntosh 2021](#)).

Typical signs: the mouth opens at an easy pace, the nostrils cave in on a hard breath, and the nose runs or blocks with training, cold air or a swim ([McIntosh 2021](#)).

02 What a weak nose costs

It won't cap top speed: with the nose clipped shut, maximum aerobic performance didn't drop ([McIntosh 2021](#)). What it costs is everything around the workout:

- **Air that skips the filter.** The nose heats, moistens and filters air; a mouth breath skips all three ([McIntosh 2021](#)).
- **Tighter airways.** Nose breathing markedly reduced exercise-induced airway narrowing in some studies, which matters most for patients prone to exercise asthma ([McIntosh 2021](#); [Dallam 2020](#)).
- **Sleep and recovery.** A blocked nose drags down sleep, mood and quality of life, with knock-on effects on health and performance ([McIntosh 2021](#)). It follows the patient to bed too: see the companion protocol, [Blocked nose at night](#).
- **Higher odds in people who train.** Rhinitis affects 21–74% of athletes against 20–25% of everyone else, and 45% of elite swimmers have the non-allergic kind ([McIntosh 2021](#)).

70%

of athletes report nasal symptoms, against 52% of non-athletes ([McIntosh 2021](#), [IOC review](#))

03 Is the nose the weak link? Three checks, two minutes

CHECK	HOW TO DO IT	WHAT IT TELLS YOU
1. The warm-up test	Mouth closed through an easy 5-minute warm-up	Most people manage nose-only breathing at a moderate effort (Dallam 2020); needing the mouth at an easy pace marks the weak link
2. The cheek pull	Breathe in through the nose, then again while gently pulling one cheek outward	Easier with the pull: the side walls are caving in. No change: a fixed narrowing or a swollen lining (McIntosh 2021)
3. The 0–10 rating	Rate from 0 to 10 how much the nose bothered training this week	5 or more: act on it. Still 5 or more after 7 days of treatment: refer (McIntosh 2021)

Repeat all three after two weeks. The patient view carries the same checks in plain words.

04 Why it happens

Two things narrow the nose in training: a lining that swells or runs, and a frame that is bent or floppy ([McIntosh 2021](#), the source for every row).

CAUSE	WHAT IT DOES	THE CLUE
Allergy (pollen; more common in outdoor sport)	Swells the lining	Itching and sneezing, worse in pollen season
Exercise, cold air, pollution or chlorine	A runny or blocked nose without an allergy	Starts with the session or the swim
A decongestant spray used for more than 5 days	Rebound swelling	Worse each time it wears off
A past knock (contact sport)	A bent septum or spur: a fixed narrowing	One side always worse; the cheek pull doesn't help
Weak side walls (past injury or surgery)	Sucked in on hard breaths	The cheek pull helps

05 How it's diagnosed

A sports doctor or ENT starts with a symptom score, the training history and the cheek-pull test, then adds tests only if needed: a camera exam, nasal airflow with and without a dilator, or allergy tests ([McIntosh 2021](#)).

OFTEN CALLED	WHAT IT MIGHT BE	WHAT POINTS TO IT
"I'm just unfit"	A nose that can't keep up	Mouth breathing at an easy pace while the legs feel fresh; the cheek pull helps (Dallam 2020 ; McIntosh 2021)
"Exercise asthma"	The chest, the nose, or both	Cough, wheeze or chest tightness during or just after exercise points to the chest: refer to a doctor (National Jewish Health)
"Swimmer's nose" or "runner's nose"	Non-allergic rhinitis	A drip or block that starts in the pool or in cold air, without itching or sneezing (McIntosh 2021)

06 Fixing it: before, during and after a workout

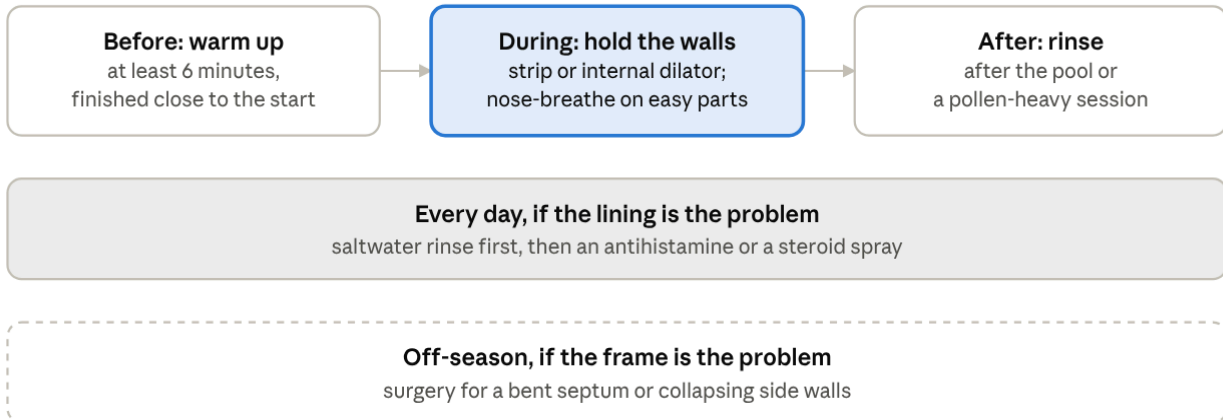
Left alone, a floppy valve only shuts harder as the athlete pushes ([McIntosh 2021](#)). Three quick fixes backfire:

- **A decongestant spray before every session:** after 5 days it causes rebound swelling ([McIntosh 2021](#)).

- **Cold and flu tablets on race day:** pseudoephedrine is banned in competition above 150 micrograms per millilitre of urine; stop it at least 24 hours before ([Sport Integrity Australia](#)).
- **Warming up too early:** the opening effect fades within 20 minutes of stopping ([Fonseca 2006](#)).

Match the fix to the moment

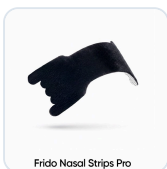
One workout from left to right, then what sits around it



When each fix works: one workout, every day, off-season. Most of the fix is timing.

WHEN	WHAT THE EVIDENCE SHOWS
Before	5 minutes of easy cycling raised nasal volume by a third (Fonseca 2006); a warm-up that ends close to the start
During	Dilators give temporary relief for collapsing walls (McIntosh 2021) and may allow nose breathing at a higher work rate (Dallam 2020)
Every day	A saltwater rinse comes first for allergic and non-allergic rhinitis, then antihistamines or steroid sprays (McIntosh 2021)
Off-season	Surgery is the only permanent fix for a bent septum or collapsing walls (McIntosh 2021)

07 Where the Frido Nasal Strip Pro fits



Frido Nasal Strip Pro

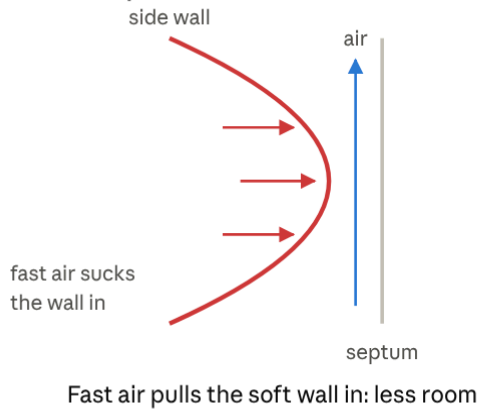
₹499 for 15 (MRP ₹1,000), prices as of 15 Oct 2026 · [product page](#)

Frido's option sits in the "during" slot. A strip works like a spring, lifting the side walls so they resist the suction of a hard breath ([Bloching 2008](#)); in one study it raised airflow through the valve by 21% and cut resistance by 27% ([Dinardi 2014](#)). Frido sells the Pro for "sports workouts and active movement" as well as overnight ([Frido](#)).

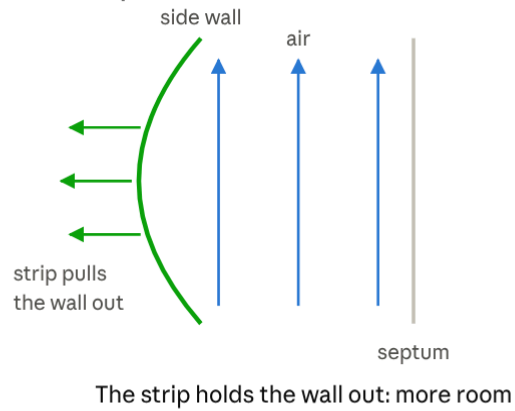
On a hard breath in, a strip holds the side wall out

Schematic of one side of the nose at the nasal valve

Without a strip



With a strip



A hard breath in: the side wall without and with a strip. The suction stays the same; the strip holds the wall out against it.

	DEFAULT Nasal Strip Pro	Nasal Strips
Price for 15 (MRP)	₹499 ₹1,000	₹399 ₹900
Grip	Sweat- and oil-resistant	Up to 12 hours; apply 30 minutes before heavy sweating
Look	Black breathable fabric	Clear, for discreet wear
Rating	4.7/5 (472 reviews)	4.6/5 (317 reviews)
Best for	Training, running and active use	Rest days, travel or a cold

Prices as listed on myfrido.com on 15 Oct 2026; check the product page for today's price.

Neither strip treats allergy, chlorine irritation or a bent septum.

08 Does the strip solve the main problem?

VERDICT: PARTLY

It holds the side walls open on hard breaths, but the most common cause in athletes is a swollen or runny lining, and it won't make anyone fitter or faster ([McIntosh 2021](#)).

PART OF THE PROBLEM	SOLVED?	WHY
Walls sucked in on hard breaths	Yes, while worn	Holds the walls out (Dinardi 2014)
Nose breathing at harder efforts	Possibly	Dilators may allow nose breathing at a higher work rate (Dallam 2020)
Swollen or runny lining (allergy, chlorine, cold air)	No	Needs a rinse or a spray (McIntosh 2021)
Bent septum after a knock	No	Only surgery changes the frame (McIntosh 2021)

PART OF THE PROBLEM	SOLVED?	WHY
Fitness, heart rate and effort	No	No gain in VO2max, heart rate or effort in a meta-analysis of healthy people (Dinardi 2020)

Can say: holds the front of the nose open during workouts; drug-free; a grip built for sweat; works alongside rinses and sprays. **Can't say:** improves performance, stamina, VO2max or recovery; treats allergy or rhinitis; "clinically proven". We found no study of Frido's own strips.

09 Which Frido strip to choose

For training, the Pro. Its sweat- and oil-resistant grip keeps it on through running and active use, and a strip only helps while it stays on ([Frido](#)). **The clear strip** suits rest days, travel or a cold, when the patient would rather it didn't show ([Frido](#)).

Make it work: clean, dry skin; 30 minutes before the session for heavy sweaters; one use per strip, wetted before peeling off ([Frido Nasal Strips](#); [Frido Nasal Strip Pro](#)). Suggest it when the cheek pull helps.

In the Frido Care app, add a strip to the plan only when your findings call for one; you accept, edit or drop every suggestion. Frido ships it to the patient directly.

10 Assessment, referral and plan

Assess: training history (sport, triggers, past knocks), the walls on a hard sniff, the cheek pull, and nasal airflow with and without a dilator ([McIntosh 2021](#)).

Refer urgently for a swelling inside the nose after a knock, as a septal haematoma can destroy cartilage, and set a broken nose within 7 days ([McIntosh 2021](#)). Cough, wheeze or chest tightness with exercise needs a chest assessment ([National Jewish Health](#)).

SETTLE Weeks 0–2

- Stop decongestant overuse; [rinse](#); antihistamine if allergic.
- A strip for training if the cheek pull helps.

RESTORE Weeks 2–6

- Steroid spray if rhinitis persists.
- Build easy [nose-only sessions](#); repeat the three checks.

REVIEW Week 6 on

- Refer to ENT if the rating stays at 5 or more after 7 days of treatment, dilators fail or training suffers; plan surgery for the off-season ([McIntosh 2021](#)).

11 Talking to the patient

Explain it in plain words

"Your nose is your workout's air filter. When its lining swells or its soft sides get sucked in, you switch to your mouth before your legs tire. We'll find which it is; each has its own fix."

Their routine before each session

Rinse if stuffy, a strip on clean, dry skin (30 minutes ahead for heavy sweaters), a warm-up close to the start, and the mouth closed on the easy parts ([UCLH](#)). No decongestant spray for more than 5 days, and cold tablets checked before a race ([Sport Integrity Australia](#)).

Send the patient view

The patient view has the explainer, the three checks, a breathe-along exercise, the routine and the safety-net in plain words, and leaves out everything clinical. Send it with **Send to patient** at the top of this page.

Safety-net every patient: come back sooner for cough, wheeze or chest tightness with exercise, a swelling inside the nose after a knock, or no change after 6 weeks ([National Jewish Health](#); [McIntosh 2021](#)).

12 Exercises and routines that help

EXERCISE	HOW MUCH	DEMO	HOW-TO
Warm-up	6 minutes or more, ending close to the start	Watch	NHS: How to warm up
Nose breathing on easy runs and walks	In over 2 steps, out over 4	Watch	UCLH respiratory physiotherapy
Saltwater rinse	Twice a day while stuffy; after the pool or pollen	Watch	West Suffolk NHS: Nasal irrigation

Most people can learn to nose-breathe at harder efforts with sustained practice, though the research is thin ([Dallam 2020](#)).

Breathe along

Guided breathing your patient can follow on screen, from NHS physiotherapy advice ([Royal Berkshire NHS, 2025](#)). Play it in the session, or send the patient view, which has the same exercise.

AT REST Breathing control

Breathe in 2 s → **Breathe out** 3 s → **Pause** 1 s · repeat 10 times

Lie or sit back, one hand on your stomach. Breathe in gently through your nose and feel your stomach rise; breathe out through your nose, longer than the in-breath, and pause.

Source: [Royal Berkshire NHS, 2025](#)

THROUGH THE DAY Short breath holds

Breathe in 2 s → **Breathe out** 3 s → **Hold** 3 s · repeat 6 times

Breathe gently through your nose, then stop and hold for a count of 2 or 3. Only as long as it doesn't make you take a bigger breath afterwards.

Source: [Royal Berkshire NHS, 2025](#)

BEFORE A RUN Easy-run rhythm

Breathe in 2 s → **Breathe out** 4 s · repeat 8 times

The rhythm for nose breathing on easy runs and walks: in over 2 steps, out over 4. Practise it standing first, then take it on an easy run.

Source: [UCLH respiratory physiotherapy](#)

Stop if you feel dizzy or light-headed, and shorten a hold if it makes you gasp afterwards. Cough, wheeze or chest tightness with exercise needs a doctor, not a breathing exercise.

Sources

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12. [NHS Fitness Studio warm-up video](#), NHS
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20. [Frido Nasal Strips](#), myfrido.com (prices as of 15 Oct 2026)

Frido Care Academy is written for physiotherapists and doctors. This guide summarises published evidence to support, not replace, clinical judgement. Online version with the patient explainer and exercise demos: <https://care.myfrido.com/academy/nose-and-exercise/>