

THE DANGEROUS COLD MEDICATION ADDICTION SWEEPING THE UK

At this time of year, colds and flu are rife, so it's no surprise that many bunged-up Brits are seeking solace from their symptoms and turning to nasal sprays for relief. 'Nasal sprays are medications delivered directly into the nose to treat symptoms such as congestion, sneezing, itching and a runny nose,' explains doctor and former NHS GP Dr Barbara Kubicka. 'Because they're applied straight to the nasal lining, they tend to work faster and more locally than tablets, with fewer whole-body side effects.'

But while a seemingly harmless quick-fix, they come with a warning not to use them for more than a week – and doing so can have dire consequences. 'When they're used for more than five to seven days, they can cause rebound congestion, medically known as rhinitis medicamentosa. Essentially, the nose becomes dependent on the spray to stay open, and when the spray wears off, the congestion comes back worse than before, which encourages people to keep using it.'

Recent research has found that people are becoming more reliant on them and are using them past their recommended usage. A recent poll revealed that 20% of Brits using the spray

have done so for seven days or more – meaning up to 5.5 million people are at risk of dependency. And nearly 60% of pharmacists believe patients are unaware that these sprays shouldn't be used long-term and are calling for clearer instructions on packaging. 'Addiction can happen surprisingly quickly, and sometimes within just a week or two of regular use,' Dr Kubicka says. 'It's not an addiction in the psychological sense, but a physical dependency of the nasal tissue. As the relief is immediate and dramatic, people naturally reach for the spray again and again.'

Often, people don't realise they're dependent until they try to stop – with some users being unable to sleep, eat or breathe without a nasal spray. In the most extreme instances, people have required surgery to remedy the damage because the nasal lining becomes so swollen and damaged that normal airflow is almost impossible without medical treatment. Dr Kubicka adds, 'It's important to emphasise that nasal sprays are not bad and are very useful when used correctly. The problem is that many are available over the counter, so people assume they're completely harmless for ongoing use.' *Closer* speaks to one mum about her addiction and the hidden dangers...



Doctor warns of terrifying addiction risk of popular over-the-counter cold and flu remedy

Pharmacy chiefs warn overuse of decongestant nasal sprays can cause irreversible damage to airways



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12-YEAR ADDICTION:

'I feel like I can't breathe without nasal sprays'



Jaimie has been using nasal sprays daily for over 12 years

Jaimie Barton, 29, lives in Colchester, Essex, with her partner and three children. After suffering with a cold when she was 17, she sought relief from a nasal spray – and quickly became hooked. And now, 12 years on, she is still struggling to kick her habit. Jaimie says, 'In 2013, I had a bad cold and my colleague offered me a nasal spray to help with the symptoms. Within a couple of minutes, my nose was completely unblocked and I could finally breathe clearly. It was such a relief.'

However, once her cold cleared up, Jaimie found she couldn't put the sprays down.

'Once I was better, I still felt quite congested so carried on using it. I would spray it a few times a day and was quickly going through a bottle a week,' she says. 'On my second bottle, I read the instructions again and saw it said I should be relieved of my symptoms after a couple of days. That's when I realised something was wrong, but I just couldn't stop using it.'

'It wasn't long before my sister noticed how much I'd been using them. She kept saying, "You should go to see a doctor. If you don't stop using them, your septum is going to fall off." When I went to the doctor for a separate issue, I brought up my nasal spray usage. He

suggested I use an over-the-counter hayfever nasal spray as they don't contain the ingredient that makes you reliant on them like a cold and flu version. But after a week of not being able to breathe, I went back to the cold and flu ones.'

To this day, Jaimie has continued using nasal sprays and says she is addicted. She adds, 'I am using them less than I was, but I still use it three to four times a day. I try not to use a full spray though. I'm not getting a full dose, but I know I need to stop entirely.'

'I find it causes me quite a lot of anxiety because I feel like I can't breathe without my sprays and I'll get quite bad headaches,

too. I also have difficulty sleeping. I've had moments of panic where, if I've forgotten it at work, I'll go home to get it. It really does affect my day-to-day life, but I haven't bothered going back to the doctors for more help as I feel I'll get the same response.'

Now, Jaimie wants to see more prominent warnings on nasal spray packaging, and restrictions on how easily they're available. She says, 'I wouldn't suggest using them at all. People should think twice, but if you really have to, you may need to consider a prescription to help. They're far too addictive considering you can get them in any shop.'

'People need to be more aware'

It's not just decongestant nasal sprays that Brits are addicted to – recent studies have shown that an alarming number of people are turning to tanning nasal sprays in the quest for perfection.

Nasal tanning sprays are designed to be sprayed into the nostrils, delivering a substance known as Melanotan II directly into the body. They claim to stimulate the production of melanin and enhance your tan.

However, they are often unregulated and Trading Standards say they have been linked to nasal congestion, respiratory problems and, in extreme cases, skin cancer.

TV personality Nicola McLean admits to being left addicted to them. She told *Closer*, 'I started using tanning nasal sprays two summers ago. I'm naturally pale and don't tan so, wanting some colour, I took them on holiday with me.'

'Within two days I was so tanned – it felt like a miracle! I started using the nasal spray every day and eventually got tan blind. I couldn't see how brown I was and how ridiculous it was until I went on live TV and was trolled about how I looked.'

'I knew then that I'd taken it too far and luckily managed to stop, but people need to be more aware of the dangers and how addictive they can be.'



TV star Nicola admits she was addicted to tanning nasal sprays

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