



Clinical Case Learning

With thanks to Dr Jonathan Carter, the patient and ANP Kirsty Hamilton

A runny nose - Localised cutaneous argyria after nasal cautery



A patient with epistaxis had nasal cautery in the ED with silver nitrate. Reattended hours later with indelible staining of skin around nose, but away from the area of cautery (see photo). Silver nitrate is transferred distally post procedure by nasal mucosal discharge & ciliary action.

Silver nitrate staining of the skin after nasal cautery is a rare but avoidable complication. Staining eventually fades with gentle exfoliation but may take weeks to months. This could have litigious implications if in a cosmetically important area.

Good Practice Points for nasal cautery:

- Spray with topical anaesthetic/vasoconstrictor.
- Dry around the area with [cotton bud](#).
- When using silver nitrate, start from the edge of the bleeding point and move centrally in a radial fashion.
- Dry around the area again if necessary.
- Apply Naseptin (check no peanut allergy) or soft paraffin in and around nostril.

For Safety Alerts and RCEM issued Safety Flashes see:

www.rcem.ac.uk/SafetyAlerts