WHAT IS RHINOSCOPY?

Fiberoptic rhinopharyngolaryngoscopy (or, rhinoscopy) is a new technique for examining the nose and throat. Usual methods can only look into the front of the nose, but with the rhinoscope your doctor can examine the entire nasal passage, including the eustachian tube openings, the adenoids, the throat, and the vocal cords.

If you are being seen in the clinic for a disorder of your airways, your doctor may want to examine these important areas. Although not difficult, the procedure takes a few minutes; if the clinic is busy it may be necessary to schedule a separate appointment for the exam.

What is a rhinoscope? The rhinoscope is a small, flexible plastic tube with fiberoptics for viewing the airway. The rhinoscope can be attached to a television camera to provide a permanent record of your examination.

What happens during the exam? First, we decongest the nose with a nose spray. This is followed by a local anesthetic nose spray. As the scope enters your nose, you will feel that it's there, but it won't hurt. Especially if you have small nasal passages, certain parts of the nasal exam can get uncomfortable; be sure to tell the doctor if anything actually hurts. During examination of the nose, you may breathe through the nose or the mouth, but when it's time to look at the back of the throat and the vocal cords, the doctor will ask you to breathe through the nose, and not to swallow. Swallowing at this point won't be dangerous, but could cause an uncomfortable sensation, just as if someone were to touch the back of your throat. Sometimes the local anesthetic drips down the back of the nose and numbs the back of the throat; this is an unpleasant sensation, but it goes away in just a few minutes. If your examination has been videotaped, the doctor will review the tape with you, if you wish.

Can children be examined? Almost nothing that happens in a doctor's office is popular with small children, and rhinoscopy is no exception. Older children put up with the procedure better than do some adults. With small children, it's best to ask the child to sit in a parent's lap. If the child is uncooperative and the exam is absolutely essential, sedation can be provided, but you will need to wait in the clinic until the sedative has worn off.

But I have asthma! Recently, physicians have discovered an unusual disorder of the larynx and vocal cords which mimics asthma. The easiest way to make the diagnosis is to examine the vocal cords with a rhinoscope during an actual attack.

What if something's wrong? Many nasal disorders respond well to medication. Should we find an abnormality that is not likely to respond to medication, or if we have questions about your exam, we will refer you to an ENT specialist.