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## Losing by a nose is part of skiing

By [ALAN WECHSLER](#), Staff writer

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First published: Thursday, February 12, 2009

When I was in the fifth grade, my nose started to run.

It never stopped.

Thirty years later, I go out into the cold prepared. I carry Kleenex packets in my jacket and keep a box at my desk at work and by my bed at home.

But the joys of the postnasal drip really come into their own while pursuing outdoor sports. There are worse afflictions, for sure. But that doesn't make the flow any easier to deal with while riding the slopes.

It took me years to learn that there's an actual scientific name for this malady — vasomotor rhinitis, aka "skier's nose."

Even doctors don't know exactly what causes it.

"It's likely associated with environmental irritants, frequently changes in atmospheric conditions, odors and aromas," said Dr. Gavin Setzen of Albany ENT and Allergy Services. "It's actually a very common problem."

A few calls to some local skiers make it clear how common this problem is.

"I can't remember going out in winter without a big wad of tissues," said Clif Mark, 60, of Sand Lake. "Once it drops to 29 degrees, it becomes a sieve."

When he races, he added, he tucks a tissue into the sleeve of his tight-fitting Lycra suit.

Jill Hayes, 52, of Waterford, is an active skier who suffers from both runny nose and teary eyes.

"I've had my goggle lenses fog up and the goggle cushion freeze to my face. Really annoying!" she said.

Bill Schaefer, president of the Schenectady Winter Sports Club, has his own technique. He keeps only one thing in his right-hand jacket pocket — an oversized bandanna. "I guess I just thought it was a normal part of being outside," he said.

For many of us, blowing our nose in the cold is part of winter. Many of us give thanks to all the ski resorts who thoughtfully give out tissues to skiers on chairlift lines or in bathrooms. Many of us think nothing about turning a bandanna over in our gloved hand and (not to be too gross here) searching for that one spot that wasn't covered in frozen nose effluent. Ah, the grace and beauty of skiing.

Drugs are available to alleviate this condition, but the benefits are limited. Clif Mark, for instance, won't take any medication to dry himself out because it would affect his breathing during a race. I've tried several prescription nasal sprays, but the only thing they seem to do is make my throat taste like medicine for the rest of the day.

Dr. Setzen says the skiers he sees don't have it as bad as some of his other patients. He treats some older people whose noses run so badly just by sitting down during a meal that they've taken to avoiding restaurants and dinners with friends.

He's seen success by having his patients combine such nasal sprays as Atrovent, the antihistamine Astelin and the steroid Flonase.

Patients might also have themselves checked for a deviated septum or polyps within the nasal area, he suggests.

Or they can do what I do, and just remember to pack an extra bandanna or two.

Alan Wechsler can be reached at 454-5469 or by e-mail at [awechsler@timesunion.com](mailto:awechsler@timesunion.com).