

Sinus Infections (Sinusitis)

DESCRIPTION

Sinusitis is an infection of one or more of the hollow air spaces in the bones of the face. Sinuses are located above and below the eyes, as well as behind the nose. The purpose of the sinuses is to cleanse and warm air before it reaches the lungs.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Thick yellow or green discharge from nose
- Painful pressure in the cheeks or forehead
- Tenderness above, behind or below the eye
- Headache
- Postnasal drip (feeling of fluid draining in the back of your throat)
- Stuffy, runny nose
- Cough, which may be productive or dry
- Bad breath
- Pain in teeth of upper jaw
- Symptoms often worse at night.

DIFFERENCE FROM “A COLD”

A common cold is due to a virus. A cold will usually clear up in seven to 10 days and does not require antibiotics. A sinus infection is often due to bacteria and may last several weeks if not treated with antibiotics. While many of the symptoms are the same, sinus infections may cause higher fever and more pain in the face than the common cold.

CAUSES

Bacteria, fungi or viruses may produce sinus infections. The bacteria may be spread from an infected person or be normally found in the nose.

RISK FACTORS

- Allergies
- Severely deviated nasal septum
- Polyps in the nose
- History of frequent sinus infections, since this may cause scarring which blocks sinus drainage
- Exposure to tobacco smoke.

PREVENTION

- Avoid exposure to tobacco smoke
- Treat colds and allergies promptly
- Wash hands often
- Ask family members who are ill to use tissues when coughing or sneezing, and dispose of them frequently.

TREATMENT

- Take acetaminophen (Tylenol®) or ibuprofen (Advil®) to reduce pain
- Take an over-the-counter decongestant such as pseudoephedrine (Sudafed®) for a stuffy nose
- Use an over-the-counter saline nose spray every two to three hours to relieve irritation in the nose
- Avoid use of medicated nose sprays (Afrin® or Neo-Synephrine®), unless directed by your physician
- Take antibiotics as prescribed.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Blow nose gently to promote drainage (forceful nose blowing may carry infection into sinuses).

CONSIDER NOTIFYING YOUR PHYSICIAN IF:

- You develop trouble breathing
- Symptoms are worse after four days of treatment
- You have a fever over 102 degrees Fahrenheit or it lasts more than three days
- You have a severe headache that does not improve with over-the-counter pain or cold medicines
- You have blurred or double vision
- Your cough lasts more than seven days
- You have shaking chills.