

Sinusitis is an infection or inflammation of the sinuses (air pockets in the front of the head above and below the eyes).

Colds, allergies or chronic irritation from smoke or dust may cause mucus in the sinuses to thicken and the tissues to become swollen. This blocks the sinus drainage passages into the nose. If these passages are not opened up after several days, the mucus will become stagnant, allowing the normal bacteria to grow and become a bacterial infection.

If mucus drainage is maintained, however, bacterial sinus infections usually can be prevented.

Yellow draining—especially first thing in the morning—is not necessarily a sinus infection.

Nasal irrigation can be very helpful and antibiotics may not be needed. This brochure suggests ways to keep your sinuses clear.

Symptoms

Acute sinusitis may be present when upper respiratory symptoms have been present for at least seven days, and two or more of the following factors are present seven days or more after the onset of illness:

- colored nasal drainage
- poor response to decongestant
- facial pain or sinus pain
- headache

When to call your clinic

Sinusitis usually can be prevented by following the sinus self-care steps. Call your clinic if:

- Sinus pain persists after five to seven days of trying self-care steps
- Sinus pain worsens after three days of self-care, especially with a temperature greater than 102° F and a past history of sinus problems
- You experience unusual pain in the eye or vision problems
- You have swelling or redness around the eyes or on the face

Sinus self-care steps

- Experts suggest that you drink enough fluids (six to 10 glasses a day) to keep mucus loose and draining.
- Heat the sinuses with hot showers, hot washcloths, hot water bottles or gel packs for five to 10 minutes, three or more times per day.
- Avoid cigarette smoke.
- Use a humidifier to moisten the air in your home and avoid cool temperatures.

- Get adequate rest, and sleep with the head of your bed elevated.
- Local pain and tenderness are common and may require pain medication as needed. Use ibuprofen (Advil®, Motrin®) or acetaminophen (Tylenol®) according to package directions.
- Decongestants to promote sinus drainage.
 - ◆ Orally: decongestants (for example, pseudoephedrine HCL, Sudafed® or generic) every four to six hours, not to exceed four doses per 24 hours.
 - ◆ Nasally: decongestant nasal sprays no longer than three days such as oxymetazoline (Afrin® or Sinex®) or phenylephrine (Neo-Synephrine® or generic)
 - ◆ You may also use both a decongestant and a spray up to two times a day for up to three to four days. Follow package directions.
 - ◆ Use of these products for more than four days may result in dependence on them and should be avoided. Talk to your doctor about using oral decongestants if you have hypertension.
 - ◆ Note: pseudoephedrine can cause insomnia or have a caffeine-like effect on some people. For men who have enlarged prostates, pseudoephedrine can worsen urinary hesitation.
- DO NOT take antihistamines unless you have allergies. They tend to thicken mucus.

Nasal irrigation

Nasal irrigation is a simple self-treatment that:

- relieves blockage of nasal passages and sinuses
- soothes mucus membranes
- clears dust, dirt and pollen
- relieves cough and discomfort due to postnasal drainage

Sinusitis

Use saline nasal irrigation once a day to maintain health of the nasal passages, and two or more times a day for active treatment of symptoms. With a little practice, this technique becomes an easy part of your daily routine.

Use homemade or saline nasal drops/spray (for example, Ocean[®], Salinex[®]).

Making saline solution

(Make new solution every day.)

1. Place ¼ teaspoon table salt in a small bowl.
2. Add 1 cup lukewarm water.
3. Stir solution until salt is dissolved.

Procedure

1. Fill a 2-ounce rubber bulb ear syringe (purchased at a drug store) with saline solution.
2. Insert tip of syringe one inch up nostril, then lift bulb upward so the tip is pointing straight (horizontal) into the nose. Hold in position and bend over a sink. Open your mouth and squeeze with enough force that solution comes out your mouth and both nostrils. Use ½ cup of the solution to rinse each nostril.
3. Very gently blow your nose.
4. Clean bowl and syringe after each use.

If you want more information on any medical topic, please contact the Park Nicollet Health Library. A medical librarian can help you find out what you need to know.

Web site: parknicollet.com/healthlibrary

E-mail: library@parknicollet.com

Phone: 952-993-5011

This brochure is based on guidelines developed by a team of health care experts at the Institute for Clinical Systems Improvement (ICSI), of which Park Nicollet Health Services is an active member. It will be reviewed and updated on a regular basis as scientific evidence changes. This material is for informational purposes only and is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis or treatment.