



SINUS PROBLEMS

Sinus problems occur when the sinuses (the air filled spaces in the bones behind the nose and above the eyes) become inflamed, swollen and blocked. Causes of sinus problems include allergy, infection, nasal irritation and sinus obstruction. Sinus problems are most common in people over the age of 20 years, when the sinuses become fully developed.

Signs and Symptoms

- Blocked nose and sinuses (congestion).
- Persistent pain, and swelling in the sinus areas behind the nose or above the eyes.

Lying down or bending forwards often worsens the pain from sinus problems.

If sinus problems are not treated adequately there is a risk of bacterial infection of the sinuses. Symptoms include:

- high temperature
- persistent sinus pain
- yellow or green mucus
- tenderness of the sinus areas
- postnasal drip
- bad breath
- impaired sense of smell

Causes of Sinus Problems

Inflammation and congestion of the sinuses can occur as a result of:

- Viral infection such as the common cold.
- Nasal allergy including sensitivity to pollens, dust mites, moulds, animals.
- Dental infection spreading into the sinuses.
- Sinus obstruction or structural problems of the nose.
- Irritation of the nasal mucosa by physical factors, air pollution, drugs (including long term use of decongestant nasal sprays), chemicals, foods and stress.

Treatment of Sinus Problems

There are many medicines that are available to treat sinus problems. Ask your pharmacist or doctor about which medicine would be best for you.

Medicines that can help to relieve symptoms include:

Decongestants

- Nasal congestion can be relieved by decongestants. These are available as tablets or syrup for oral use and as nasal sprays and drops for topical use.
- To avoid rebound congestion, decongestant nasal sprays and drops should not be used for more than about seven days.
- Your pharmacist can give you useful advice about the correct way to use nasal sprays and drops.

Important

See your doctor if symptoms persist for more than 7 to 10 days or if any of the following symptoms are present:

- high temperature
- yellow or green mucus in the nose
- earache
- swollen glands in the neck
- impaired sense of smell

An infection or some other medical condition could cause these symptoms. Look after yourself by seeing a doctor straight away.

In children, sinus problems can result in irritability and vomiting (with retching on mucus) and sometimes an ongoing cough. When a sinus problem in a child is suspected, take the child to a doctor for assessment.

Antihistamines

- Antihistamines can reduce runny nose and sneezing.
- Non-drowsy antihistamines are preferable if you need to drive or if you are undertaking activities where you need to remain alert.
- Some medicines are available that contain a combination of a decongestant with an antihistamine.

Pain Relievers

Reduction of nasal congestion with decongestants usually reduces sinus pain. Pain relievers such as paracetamol and ibuprofen can also provide additional pain relief (see *Pain Relievers* Fact Card)

Other Treatments

- A saline nose spray or drops can help to clear the sinuses
- Steam inhalations can help to reduce nasal congestion
- Some people find that aromatherapy can be beneficial in relieving sinus pain and congestion

Some medicines for sinus problems should not be used if you have:

- diabetes
- high blood pressure
- heart disease

Tell your doctor or pharmacist what other medicines you take and ask them what you need to be aware of before starting a new medicine for sinus problems.

Always ask your pharmacist about which medicine would be most suitable for you.

Prevention of Sinus Problems

- Avoid irritants and allergens that commonly cause sinus problems (cigarette smoke, pollen, dust mites, thick rugs and carpets, moulds and pets).
- Limit the use of decongestant nasal sprays and drops to no more than seven days.

Self Care

- Talk to your pharmacist and doctor about medicines to help manage your sinus symptoms.
- Drink lots of fluids to help to keep the nasal discharge thin. This allows the sinuses to drain better.
- Blowing your nose can make the condition worse by forcing mucus up into the sinuses. If you feel as though you need to blow your nose, make sure that you blow gently, clearing one nostril at a time.
- If you think that your sinus problems are a result of an allergy, reduce exposure to pollens, plants, pets and moulds. Consider use of air-conditioning with filters and using face masks when mowing the lawn or working outside during pollen season.



Other Fact Cards of Interest

- *Hayfever and Sinus Problems*
- *Pain Relievers*
- *Headache*
- *Ear Problems*
- *Medicines and Driving*
- *Colds and Flu*

Contact

Your doctor (listed under Medical Practitioners in the yellow pages of the phone book)

Your Self Care pharmacist: To find: (02) 6283 4777.


Poisons Information Centre on 131 126 from anywhere in Australia.

Pharmacists are medicine experts. Ask your pharmacist for advice when choosing medicine.

Your **Self Care** Pharmacist

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