

# Health Tips

Your Good Health Information From eDocAmerica

with

Dr. D



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## Reader Requested

### Health Tip: Sinus Infections, Part 1 - Acute Sinusitis

The sinuses are air-filled, hollow cavities located in the facial region of the skull. Normally, sinuses contain no germs and are open, allowing mucus to drain and air to circulate. Should the mucous membranes lining the sinuses become inflamed, swelling occurs that interferes with the normal drainage of mucus. This condition, known as acute sinusitis, may be caused by either infectious or non-infectious triggers. Infectious causes include viruses, bacteria and fungi. Allergies, growths in the nasal passages, deviation of the nasal septum, and medical conditions such as gastroesophageal reflux are some of the causes for sinusitis that are not related to infection.

Sinusitis affects as many as 35 million people each year in the U.S. with approximately half of these people seeking medical attention. Many people think that sinusitis always requires treatment with antibiotics. In fact, most cases of sinusitis are due to viruses such as the ones that cause the common cold. The majority of these cases of sinusitis will clear on their own within a week or two. In a small percentage of people with viral sinusitis, obstruction of the passages draining one the sinuses sets the stage for bacterial overgrowth. This is called bacterial sinusitis and is a potentially much more serious problem.



**Sinusitis symptoms:** The symptoms of acute sinusitis, whether bacterial or viral are similar, consist of:

- Facial pain or pressure (usually one-sided)
- Nasal congestion and drainage
- Dental pain (when the maxillary sinus below the eye is involved)
- Fever or Fatigue and generally not feeling well

Symptoms related to a bacterial rather than viral sinusitis may be somewhat worse, particularly in regard to the degree of fever and facial pain. The color of

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the nasal drainage, however, whether yellow or green, has a poor correlation with the underlying cause of the infection.

**Treatment for sinusitis:** Depending on the underlying cause, treatment of sinusitis usually begins with the use of nasal decongestants, nasal corticosteroid spray, nasal lavage or use of a nasal saline solution. If allergies are believed to be playing a role, taking antihistamines may be helpful. The following self-care measures help to reduce congestion in the sinuses:

- Application of warm, moist washcloth to the face several times a day.
- Drinking plenty of fluids to thin the mucus.
- Inhaling steam 2 - 4 times per day (for example, sitting in the bathroom with the shower running) and using a humidifier at night.



When a bacterial infection is suspected, a course of antibiotics may be prescribed. The decision as to which to use is based on the strain of bacteria that is most likely to be causing the infection, along with the considerations of expense and individual medication allergies. Using antibiotics to treat viral sinusitis not only doesn't help with the infection, but it can also lead to the development of resistant bacteria.

**Can sinusitis be prevented?** Sinusitis occurs almost as commonly as the common cold. While there is no way to completely avoid getting sinusitis, here are some suggestions that may help keep a viral sinusitis from becoming a bacterial one:

- Avoid cigarette smoke and other pollutants which can constrict sinus passages
- Avoid drinking alcohol which can cause the mucous membranes in the sinuses to swell
- Avoid air travel which can increase pressure and discomfort in the sinuses

**Stay tuned - Next week, we'll look at chronic sinusitis.**

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11719 Hinson Road, Suite 130 Little Rock, Arkansas 72212

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