



Pharmaceutical
Society of Australia



Sinus Problems

Sinuses are air-filled spaces within the bones around the nose. They are connected to each other, the nose and the throat. Sinus problems occur when the lining of a sinus becomes inflamed and swollen (sinusitis) or when normal mucus drainage from the sinus is blocked. Medicines can help sinus problems.

Signs and symptoms

Symptoms of sinus problems include:

- Blocked nose and sinuses (congestion), with a feeling of pressure inside the face
- Postnasal drip (fluid from the sinuses and nose constantly drips down the back of the throat), which can lead to constant coughing
- Yellow or green mucus in nose or throat
- Pain in the sinus areas around the forehead, temples, cheeks, nose and eyes. Lying down or bending forwards often worsens sinus pain
- Headache
- Tiredness
- Teeth pain
- Sore throat
- Bad breath
- Altered senses of smell and taste
- Nausea
- Fever.

Important

Consult a doctor if you have:

- Symptoms for more than 7-10 days
- Recurring sinus problems (more than 3 episodes per year)
- High fever
- Yellow or green mucus in nose or throat
- Pain, swelling or redness on face or around eyes
- Ear ache
- Swollen glands in the neck
- Wheezing or shortness of breath
- Severe headache
- Stiff neck
- Confusion.

Note: If your child has symptoms of a sinus problem, consult a doctor.



Causes of sinus problems

Things that can cause inflammation and congestion of the lining of the sinuses (sinusitis) include:

- Infection – that may be viral (e.g., the common cold) or bacterial. Tooth and gum infections can also spread into the sinuses
- Allergy (e.g., to pollens, dust mites, moulds or animals)
- Irritation by irritants such as cigarette smoke, chlorine and other chemicals, some foods
- Atmospheric pressure changes, such as air travel or underwater swimming
- Some medicines (e.g., long-term use of decongestant nasal sprays)
- Some medical conditions
- Stress.

Normal mucus drainage from the sinuses can be blocked by:

- Swollen linings of the nasal passages and sinuses
- Excess mucus production (e.g., due to allergy or infection)
- Physical obstruction (e.g., nasal polyps, broken nose).

Treatment of sinus problems

A variety of medicines and other treatments can help sinus problems. Most are available from a pharmacist without a prescription. Ask a pharmacist or doctor for advice.

Medicines

Decongestants

- Decongestants can reduce nasal congestion and mucus production. These are available as tablets, syrups, nasal sprays and nose drops.
- To avoid rebound congestion, decongestant nasal sprays and drops should not be used for more than five days without a break.
- A pharmacist can advise on the correct way to use nasal sprays and drops.
- Decongestant nasal sprays and drops should be avoided in children less than six months old.

Note: Some decongestants should not be used by those who have diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease or prostate problems – ask a pharmacist or doctor.

Pain relievers

Decongestants can reduce sinus pain by reducing congestion. Pain relievers such as paracetamol and ibuprofen can also give pain relief.

Antihistamines

- Antihistamines can reduce nasal congestion, runny nose and sneezing due to allergy.
- Some oral antihistamines cause drowsiness; others do not – ask a pharmacist.
- Some sinus products contain a combination of a decongestant with an antihistamine.

Corticosteroids

Corticosteroids (anti-inflammatory medicines) can reduce or prevent inflammation and swelling of the linings of the nose and sinuses.

Nasal sprays, used regularly, can help treat and prevent sinusitis. Sometimes a doctor will prescribe a short course of tablets (e.g., prednisolone) for severe sinusitis.

Antibiotics

Antibiotics may be prescribed by a doctor to treat a bacterial sinus infection.

Other treatments

- A saline (salt water) nose spray or sinus wash can help to cleanse the sinuses.
- Steam inhalations can help to reduce nasal congestion.
- Some people find aromatherapy beneficial in relieving sinus pain and congestion.
- A comfortably hot compress held against the face can relieve discomfort.

Self care

- Drink plenty of fluids to help thin mucus and nasal discharge. This will allow the sinuses to drain better. Drink enough water every day to satisfy your thirst and to keep your urine 'light-coloured' (unless a doctor advises otherwise).
- Blowing the nose can make the condition worse by forcing mucus up into the sinuses. The best way to blow the nose is gently, clearing one nostril at a time.
- Avoid irritant chemicals and allergens that commonly cause sinus problems (e.g., cigarette smoke, pollen, dust mites (often in thick rugs and carpets), moulds and pets). Clean the house regularly and use a face mask when working outside.
- Don't smoke.
- Limit alcohol – alcohol can worsen sinusitis.

Related fact cards

- *Colds and Flu*
- *Ear Problems*
- *Hay fever*
- *Headache*
- *Medicines and Driving (website only – ask your pharmacist)*
- *Pain Relievers*

For more information

Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy – website www.allergy.org.au

HEALTHInsite – website www.healthinsite.gov.au

Consumer Medicine Information (CMI) leaflets – your pharmacist can advise on availability.

NPS Medicines Line – phone 1300 888 763 Monday to Friday, 9am to 6pm EST.

The Poisons Information Centre – in case of poisoning phone 131 126 from anywhere in Australia.

Pharmacists are medicines experts. Ask a pharmacist for advice when choosing a medicine.

Your **Self Care** Pharmacist