

Sinusitis

Sinus infection (sinusitis) is commonly due to a virus, and usually goes away on its own without treatment. Painkillers may be needed. Antibiotics are only sometimes needed. Decongestants and steam inhalations are popular remedies, but their value is not proven.

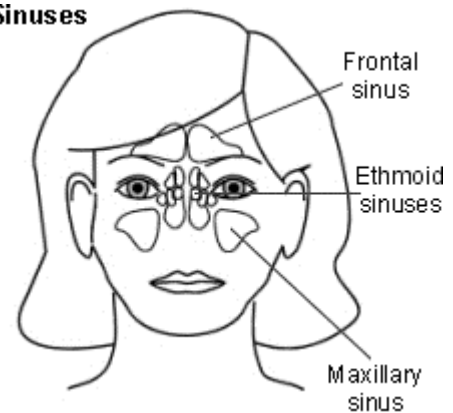
What are sinuses?

The sinuses are small, air filled spaces inside the cheekbones and forehead. They make some mucus, which drains into the nose through small channels.

What is sinusitis?

Sinusitis means inflammation of a sinus. Most bouts of sinusitis are caused by an infection, and are usually acute (develop quickly and last a short time). The cheekbone (maxillary) sinus is the most commonly affected. In some cases, sinusitis becomes chronic (persistent).

Sinuses



How do you get acute sinusitis?

- Acute sinusitis usually develops from a cold or flu-like illness. Colds and flu are caused by viruses, which may spread to the sinuses.
- In some cases, bacteria 'add-on' to an infection that started with a virus. This can make the infection worse and last longer.
- In rare cases, an infection spreads to the maxillary sinus from an infected tooth.

Once the lining of the sinus is infected, the sinus cavity fills with extra mucus, and sometimes pus.

What are the symptoms of acute sinusitis?

- Pain and tenderness over the infected sinus. The pain is often throbbing, and worse when you bend your head forward. Chewing may be painful.
- Blocked nose. Your sense of smell may also go for a while.
- A runny nose. The discharge may be green/yellow due to infected mucus and pus. A runny nose may dry up if the sinus channels become blocked with thick mucus. If this happens, pain and

tenderness over the infected sinus may become worse.

- High temperature (fever) may develop, and you may feel generally unwell.

What are the treatments for sinusitis?

- **Often, no treatment is needed.** Most cases are due to a virus infection. Like colds, the immune system fights off the virus, and symptoms usually go within a week. Even if bacteria cause the infection, your immune system will usually be able to clear it away.
- **Painkillers** such as Tylenol or ibuprofen will usually ease the pain. Sometimes stronger painkillers such as codeine are needed for a short time.
- **Antibiotics** may be prescribed if symptoms are severe, or do not settle within 7-10 days. Antibiotics do not kill viruses, but kill bacteria, which sometimes cause a more severe or prolonged sinusitis.
- **Decongestant nasal sprays or drops** are sometimes used. You can buy these from pharmacies. They may briefly relieve a blocked nose. However, they are not thought to shorten the duration of acute sinusitis. You should not use a decongestant spray or drops for more than 5-7 days at a time. If they are used longer than this, they may cause a worse, 'rebound' congestion in the nose.
- **Steam inhalation** is a traditional remedy. There is little scientific evidence that it works, but some people say that it helps. You can do this for 5-10 minutes, 3 or 4 times a day. The aim is to clear the nose, and to help drain infected mucus from the sinuses. One method is to bend over a bucket of hot, steamy water, and breathe deeply. This not only gets steam into your nose, but your head bent down is the best position to drain the sinuses. Menthol added to the water may help. A steamy shower may also help. (Note: do not use steam coming out of a kettle, as it will burn!)

See a doctor if symptoms do not ease within a few days, or if you have recurring bouts of sinusitis.

Can sinusitis be prevented?

Usually not. However, some people say that if you use a decongestant spray and steam inhalations at the first sign of any symptoms, it may help the mucus to drain, and stop the sinus channels from becoming blocked. This may 'nip it in the bud' and prevent a full-blown sinusitis from developing. There is no proof that this works. However, it may be worth a try for a day or so if you suspect sinusitis is developing during a cold.