

Sinusitis

Sinusitis is common for people with HIV. The chance of infection rises as CD4 cell counts drop. A person with HIV may have it many times a year.

The sinuses are spaces above and below the eyes and on each side of the nose. They warm the air before it is breathed in. The outer layers make mucus. The mucus traps germs, dust and things that come up the nose.

Acute sinusitis is caused by an infection. It can last up to four weeks.

Chronic sinusitis is often caused by allergies and can go on for years. It is normal for it to last at least eight or more weeks.

Signs

It is easy to mistake sinusitis for a cold. If the symptoms last more than a week, it is most likely not a cold. Signs of sinusitis include:

- Cough that gets worse at night
- Stuffy or runny nose. The mucus may be thick and colored.
- Mucus drains down the back of the throat. This may cause a bad taste in the mouth, bad breath or a hoarse voice.
- Ear pain or stuffy ears. It may be hard to hear.
- Fever
- Headache
- Not able to smell
- Pain or pressure around the cheekbones, jaw, teeth, eyes and forehead

Causes and Risk Factors

The sinuses have tiny holes to drain mucus. Pressure builds when they get plugged. This can cause sinus pain. This often happens when you have a cold or allergy attack.

Sometimes germs grow in the mucus, which leads to an infection.

Other causes include:

- A weak immune system. Infections cause more problems for a person with HIV.
- Allergies, fumes, damp weather, dust, mold and pollen
- Asthma
- Dental problems. The upper teeth lie below the sinuses. A tooth infection can travel into the sinuses.
- Cystic fibrosis. This causes problems with how mucus is made and moved in the body.
- When you fly or scuba dive. Both involve changes in air pressure. They can make the sinuses swell. A person with a cold who flies has a greater chance of sinus problems.
- Pregnancy. This is due to changes in hormones.
- Problems in your nose. This happens if the stiff tissue that supports the nose is not straight.

How to Know You Have Sinusitis

A doctor can tell if you have sinusitis by the symptoms and an exam. Other tests that may be ordered are:

- Blood tests to rule out other problems
- Cultures. This is where a doctor takes a sample of blood and tries to find the cause of the infection.

- Take a sample of tissue from the nose get a closer look.
- CT scan. This is only done if symptoms are not clear or do not get better after treatment.

Treatment

The treatment of sinusitis will try to:

- Get rid of any infection
- Shrink swollen sinus tissues
- Drain pooled mucus

If bacteria or fungus cause the problem, you need to use the right antibiotic. Certain types of medications (meds) work against certain types of infections. A doctor may use one or more meds that are likely to cure the infection.

Swollen sinus tissues can be treated with a steroid nose spray. This can help stop the swelling.

Avoid the use of sprays to clear your nasal passage. The more they are used, the more the body fights against their effects. Soon, the nose is always stuffy unless the spray is used.

Mucus can be removed if you sniff warm salt water from a cup or use a neti pot. The water is then sneezed or drained. This washes out the nose and sinuses. It helps reduce the chance of infection. If you use a neti pot, make sure the water is distilled, sterile or has been boiled and cooled. There is an ameba in tap water that can get in your brain.

Surgery may be needed in some cases. This is done if there are growths or problems in the nose.

The pain of sinusitis can be helped by:

- Breathe warm, moist air from a vaporizer
- Apply warm, moist towel to the painful areas

Pain killers such as aspirin or ibuprofen

Prevention

You may not be able to prevent all sinus problems. These steps can help:

- Keep your immune system strong and make efforts not to catch a cold.
- Eat a well balanced diet and take vitamins daily. Vitamin C can help protect the nose, sinuses and lungs.
- Avoid alcohol. It causes the inside of the nose and sinuses to swell.
- Try not to swim in water with chlorine. Chlorine bothers the nose and sinuses.
- Do not dive into a pool. This forces water into the sinuses from the nose.
- Before you fly, talk to a doctor about nose drops or meds to open your nasal passage.
- Inhale steam at the first sign of sinus infection. Cover your head in a towel and hold your head over a bowl of hot water. Face steamers for skin care or ones for people with sinus problems can be used.
- Do not smoke or breathe chemical fumes (even from household products).
- Keep the temperature even by using an air conditioner. Use special filters on the air conditioner to help remove allergens from the air. These filters should be changed often.
- Use a humidifier.
- Vacuum and dust your home often.

For more information

Contact your Registered Nurse Care Manager, or call Positive Healthcare's Nurse Advice Line at: (800) 797-1717.

