



# NORTH TEXAS ALLERGY & ASTHMA ASSOCIATES

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## SINUSITIS

### What is sinusitis?

Sinuses are air-filled cavities in the bones of your face. These cavities are lined with mucus membranes. Sinusitis is the condition in which these membranes swell and become inflamed or the cavity becomes filled with infected material.

### How does it occur?

A number of different irritants can cause sinusitis. Sinusitis often occurs after a cold, but not always. Bacteria, viruses, allergies, and even fungus can cause sinusitis. If your nasal bones have been injured or are deformed, causing partial blockage of the sinus openings, you are more likely to get sinusitis.

### What are the symptoms?

Symptoms include:

- feeling of fullness and congestion in your head that may cause a headache that is most painful when you first wake up in the morning, and when you bend your head down or forward
- tenderness above, behind, or below the eyes or sore cheeks, or what feels like a toothache or sore jaw
- chronic runny nose and congestion or a feeling of fluid draining in the back of your throat (postnasal drainage)
- cough, especially at night or morning and/or evening sore throat

### How is it treated?

The simplest, least expensive treatments for mild sinusitis symptoms are nonprescription or prescription decongestants. Note that you should not use nonprescription decongestant nasal sprays for more than 2 days as overuse can cause a runny nose and congestion, in a condition called rhinitis medicamentosa. If nonprescription decongestants are not sufficient, or if the symptoms are severe, antibiotics are sometimes needed. Occasionally a prolonged course of decongestants and antibiotics will be required, sometimes for 2 to 6 weeks. In cases of chronic (recurrent) sinus infections, allergies may be the cause. A trial of antihistamines or prescription nasal sprays may be indicated. Radiologic studies may be needed to confirm an infection or to look for causes such as a small benign growth or polyp in the sinuses. In cases of chronic, severe sinusitis, a surgical drainage procedure may be necessary. The surgeon can create an extra or enlarged passageway in the wall of the sinus cavity. This allows the sinuses to drain more easily through the nasal passages and remain free of infection.

### How long will the effects last?

Symptoms may improve gradually over a few days, or longer if the inflammation has been present for a while. Recovery time depends on the cause and severity of the sinusitis. Recovering from sinusitis is much like recovering from a cold.

### How can I take care of myself?

- Avoid smoke and other inhaled irritants and allergens, such as animal dander
- Add moisture to the air with a humidifier (careful if you have a mold allergy)
- Inhale steam from a basin of hot water or shower to relieve pain
- Take antibiotics as prescribed and use all of the medicine; it's difficult to achieve good antibiotic concentrations in the sinuses and one usually feels well before all the bacteria have been killed
- Use oral decongestants as directed
- Never use nasal spray decongestants for more than 2 days because worsen your symptoms

### What can I do to help prevent sinusitis?

To prevent sinusitis you must prevent the causes of sinusitis; colds and allergies. If you have congestion, recognize your symptoms early as decongestants may minimize your discomfort and prevent infections.