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Sinusitis

What are sinuses?

Sinuses are the air chambers in the bone behind your cheeks, eyebrows and jaw. They make mucus, a fluid that cleans bacteria and other particles out of the air you breathe. Tiny hairs called cilia (say: "sill-ee-ah") sweep mucus out of your sinuses so it can drain out through your nose.

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What is sinusitis?

Sinusitis (say: "sine-you-site-iss") is the name for a condition in which the lining of your sinuses becomes inflamed.

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FDA Warning

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) advises against the use of ear candles. Ear candles can cause serious injuries and there is no evidence to support their effectiveness. For more information, please visit the [FDA Web site](#).

What causes sinusitis?

Anything that causes swelling in your sinuses or keeps the cilia from moving mucus can cause sinusitis. This can occur because of changes in temperature or air pressure. Allergies can cause sinusitis. Using decongestant nasal sprays too much, smoking, swimming or diving can also increase your risk of getting sinusitis. Some people have growths called polyps (say: "pawl-ips") that block their sinus passages and cause sinusitis.

When sinusitis is caused by a bacterial or viral infection, you get a sinus infection. Sinus infections sometimes occur after you've had a cold. The cold virus attacks the lining of your sinuses, causing them to swell and become narrow. Your body responds to the virus by producing more mucus, but it gets blocked in your swollen sinuses. This built-up mucus is a good place for bacteria to grow. The bacteria can cause a sinus infection.

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What are the symptoms of sinusitis?

The symptoms of sinusitis include:

- Pain or pressure in the forehead, cheeks, nose and between the eyes

- Headache
- Fever
- Nasal congestion
- Reduced sense of smell and taste
- Cough, which may be worse at night
- Bad breath (called halitosis)
- An ache in the teeth

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How is acute sinusitis treated?

Treatment for sinusitis depends on the cause.

You can use a saline nasal spray, which will clean out your nasal passages and help clear congestion. Your doctor may recommend a prescription nasal spray that helps treat inflammation.

If you have sinus pain or pressure, your doctor may prescribe or recommend a decongestant to help your sinuses drain. Decongestants are generally only recommended for short-term use.

Over-the-counter pain relievers such as acetaminophen (one brand name: Tylenol) and ibuprofen (some brand names: Advil, Motrin) can ease headache and sinus pain.

If your case of sinusitis is very severe and your doctor thinks the cause is bacterial, he or she may prescribe an antibiotic. You may take an antibiotic for 10 to 14 days, but you will usually start feeling better a couple of days after you start taking it. It is important to take antibiotics exactly as your doctor tells you and to continue taking it until it is completely gone, even after you're feeling better.

If allergies are causing your sinusitis, your doctor may treat the allergy. Then the sinusitis will usually clear up on its own.

See the box below for other things you can do to feel better when you have sinusitis.

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Tips on taking care of sinusitis

- Get plenty of rest. Lying down can make your sinuses feel more stopped-up, so try lying on the side that lets you breathe the best. You can prop yourself up with a pillow.
- Sip hot liquids and drink plenty of fluids.
- Apply moist heat by holding a warm, wet towel against your face or breathing in steam through a cloth or towel. This will relieve sinus pressure and help open your sinus passages.
- Talk with your doctor before using an over-the-counter cold medicine. Some cold medicines can make your symptoms worse or cause other problems.
- Don't use a nasal spray with a decongestant in it for more than 3 days. If you use it for more than 3 days, the swelling in your sinuses may get worse when you stop using the medicine.
- Avoid alcohol, which can worsen swelling in the sinuses.

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