

Sinuses

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 sweep mucus out of your sinuses so it can drain out through your nose.

What is sinusitis?

Sinusitis is the name for a condition in which the lining of your sinuses becomes inflamed.

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 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.

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
- An ache in the teeth

How is acute sinusitis treated?

If your doctor thinks the cause of your sinusitis 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 this medicine exactly as your doctor tells you and to continue taking it until it is completely gone, even after you're feeling better. If you have sinus pain or pressure, your doctor may prescribe or recommend a decongestant to help your sinuses drain.

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