

Patient Information

Sinusitis

Ears, Nose and Throat Department



About sinusitis

Sinusitis is a common condition in which the lining of the sinuses becomes inflamed (swollen). It's usually caused by a viral infection and often improves within two or three weeks. The mucus produced by your sinuses usually drains into your nose through small channels but, in sinusitis, these channels become blocked because the sinus linings are inflamed.

Signs and symptoms

Sinusitis usually occurs after an upper respiratory tract infection, such as a cold. If you have a persistent cold and develop the symptoms below, you may have sinusitis. Symptoms of sinusitis include:

- A green or yellow discharge from your nose.
- Blocked nose.
- Pain and tenderness around your cheeks, eyes or forehead.
- A sinus headache.
- A high temperature (fever) of 38°C or more.
- Toothache.
- Reduced sense of smell.
- Bad breath (halitosis).

Children with sinusitis may be irritable, breathe through their mouth and have difficulty feeding. Their speech may also sound nasal (as though they have a stuffy cold). The symptoms of sinusitis often clear up within a few weeks (acute sinusitis), although they can last three months or more (chronic sinusitis).

What causes sinusitis?

Sinusitis is usually the result of a cold or flu virus spreading to the sinuses from the upper airways. Only a few cases are caused by bacteria infecting the sinuses. An infected tooth or fungal infection can also occasionally cause the sinuses to become inflamed. It's not clear exactly what causes sinusitis to become chronic (long-lasting) but it has been associated with:

- Allergies and related conditions, including allergic rhinitis (inflammation of the inside of the nose), asthma and hay fever.
- Nasal polyps (growths inside the nose).
- Smoking.
- A weakened immune system.

Making sure underlying conditions such as allergies and asthma are well controlled may improve the symptoms of chronic sinusitis.

How is sinusitis treated?

Most people with sinusitis will feel better within two or three weeks and can look after themselves at home. You can help relieve your symptoms by:

- Taking over-the-counter painkillers, such as paracetamol or ibuprofen - always follow the dose instructions on the packet.
- Using nasal decongestants – but these shouldn't be used for more than a week, as this might make things worse.
- Using a warm compress (e.g. soak a flannel in hot water, wring out the excess water and hold to your face).
- Regularly cleaning the inside of your nose with a saline solution (a mix of salt and water)– you can make this at home yourself or use sachets of ingredients bought from a pharmacy.

When to see your GP

If your symptoms are mild and getting better, you don't usually need to see your GP and can look after yourself at home. However, you should arrange to see your GP if:

- Your symptoms are severe or getting worse.
- Your symptoms haven't started to improve after around 7-10 days.
- You experience episodes of sinusitis frequently.

Your GP will usually be able to diagnose sinusitis from your symptoms and by examining the inside of your nose. If you have severe or recurrent sinusitis, they may refer you to an ear, nose and throat (ENT) specialist for further assessment.

If your symptoms don't get better after trying these treatments, your GP may refer you to an ENT specialist for surgery to improve the drainage of your sinuses.

Surgery for sinusitis

Surgery to treat chronic sinusitis is called Functional Endoscopic Sinus Surgery (FESS). FESS is carried out under general anaesthetic (when you're asleep). The surgeon can widen your sinuses by either:

- Removing some of the blocked tissue.
- Inflating a tiny balloon in the blocked sinuses, then removing it.

For more information about FESS, visit the ENT UK website:

www.entuk.org/functional-endoscopic-sinus-surgery-fess

Useful Telephone Numbers

- Switchboard, Lister Hospital
☎ 01438 314333 - ask for ENT Department
- ENT Nurse Specialist (Monday to Friday, 9am - 5pm)
☎ Mobile: 0778 534 3359 or 0787 639 0290

In an emergency, dial 999 and request an ambulance or attend your nearest Emergency Department.

NHS 111 can help if you have an urgent medical problem and you're not sure what to do. It is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

☎ 111

Useful websites and further information

www.entuk.org

www.nhs.uk/conditions/sinusitis-sinus-infection/

www.cks.nice.org.uk/topics/sinusitis/

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