



ENT & Audiology

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Plain Language for Sinusitis

by David R. Charnock, MD, FACS

As the days get colder and the leaves get brighter, cold and flu season, viral infections and sinusitis seem to become more prevalent as we move indoors and turn the heat on. The sinus cavities are groups of hollow spaces surrounding the nose, around the eyes and above the mouth. When the sinuses are blocked, inflamed or infected, they may cause runny nose, congestion, clogging of the nasal passages, facial pain and pressure or both. Other symptoms might include fever, cough, chills, or lack of energy, dental pain and ear fullness.

Sinus infections are most often caused by viruses, which usually improve within 10 to 14 days, while a bacterial infection may last longer with more symptoms. Most cases of sinusitis are short-lived; however, some are chronic and long-lasting.

Viral sinusitis does not require antibiotics, but rather a watchful waiting with symptomatic over-the-counter treatment such as normal saline nasal spray. Some patients with bacterial sinusitis, however, may benefit from antibiotics. To reduce symptoms, sometimes pain relievers such as Tylenol may be used in addition to nasal steroid sprays.

Sinusitis affects almost one in eight adults annually. Even for acute bacterial sinusitis, watchful waiting without antibiotic therapy is a proven effective way to treat since most people will get better on their own. However, if you are getting worse with sinus pressure symptoms, do not hesitate to call your health care provider for evaluation and treatment. **For more information, please visit the American Academy of Otolaryngology Head and Neck Surgery Foundation website at www.entnet.org.**

Today's Health Talk was written by David R. Charnock, MD, FACS of Rutland Regional Medical Center's ENT & Audiology and is based in part on a summary published by the American Academy of Otolaryngology Head and Neck Surgery that was developed by a multi-disciplinary team of healthcare providers to include the American Academy of Otolaryngology, ENT, infectious disease specialist, family medicine doctors, allergy and immunology, advanced practice nursing and consumer advocates.