

SINUS PAIN AND SINUSITIS

Sinusitis is an inflammation of the lining of the sinuses. Inflammation may be caused by viral and/or bacterial infection or allergies. Sinuses are small, air-filled cavities in your head that are surrounded by dense bone (see diagram below). Sinuses have small connecting outlets to your nose. Occasionally, negative pressure in the sinuses cause pain. This condition is known as “vacuum sinusitis” and is not related to a bacterial infection. Much more common is the collection of thick mucus in the sinuses, resulting in pain in the face, sometimes radiating to the teeth, ears, and/or head; pain is usually worse when you bend your head forward. Foul breath and cough may also be present.

The goal of treating sinusitis is two-fold: draining the sinuses and, if it is felt that bacteria are present, treating the bacterial infection with an antibiotic.

To drain the sinuses, you may be prescribed oral decongestants such as pseudoephedrine, mucolytics such as guaifenesin, and saltwater or other nasal sprays. In allergy-related cases, antihistamines may also be recommended. Increased intake of fluids and steam may also be helpful. Those with recurrent sinus symptoms should consider starting these medications early in the course of an upper respiratory infection/cold.

If an antibiotic treatment is to be considered, it is generally done so only after 7 days of sinus problems. Take the antibiotic on time and take it for the entire length of time prescribed. However, if you break out in a rash or become nauseated and are unable to tolerate the medicine, stop taking it and call or see your practitioner. A follow-up check may be recommended in order to make sure that your sinus infection is clearing or has resolved.

