

What is sinusitis?

- Sinusitis is a condition of the sinuses.
- Sinuses are part of the upper respiratory (breathing) system.
- They are found around the nose, forehead, and the eyes. They are tiny pockets of air in the facial bones.
- Sinusitis is when these small areas become infected or irritated and cannot drain mucus as well as they should.
- Sinusitis can be acute or chronic.
- Symptoms of acute sinusitis last for less than one month.
- Symptoms of chronic sinusitis last for longer than a month.

What causes it?

- Sinusitis can be caused by a viral or bacterial infection.
- It can be caused by problems with how the nose is formed.
- It can be caused by growths in the nose.

Who can get it?

- Anyone can get sinusitis.
- Children are more likely than adults to get it. Children's sinuses are smaller and more easily blocked when irritated.
- People with cystic fibrosis have a high chance of getting sinusitis.
- People who have recently had an upper respiratory infection, such as a cold, are more likely to get it.
- People who swim or dive a lot are more likely to get it.
- People with hay fever, allergies, or asthma are more likely to get it.
- People with certain diseases, such as cancer or HIV, are at risk.
- People who smoke are more likely to get sinusitis.

What are the symptoms?

Young children may complain of having a cold. Symptoms of sinusitis may be similar to a cold but they last for at least 10 days. Symptoms of chronic sinusitis are often milder than symptoms of acute sinusitis.

- Stuffy nose
- Yellow or green mucus
- Blood in the mucus
- Bad smelling mucus
- Redness in the nose
- Swelling or aching around the eyes
- Tenderness around the cheeks or eyes
- Cheek pain that may be described as a toothache
- Stuffy head
- Morning headache
- Headache that is more painful when bending forward
- Dry cough
- Low fever
- Trouble sleeping
- Upset stomach
- Vomiting mucus
- Sore throat

Is it contagious?

- No. Sinusitis is not contagious. However, a common cold often causes it and the cold may be contagious.

How is it treated?

- Take your child to the doctor if he has symptoms of sinusitis.
- The doctor may need to take tests.
- The goal of treatment is to help the sinuses drain and if needed, cure the infection.
- Viral infections usually go away without treatment within 10 to 14 days. Antibiotics will not help.
- Bacterial infections can be treated with antibiotics. Have your child take the full prescription. Antibiotics are usually given for 14 days. They may be needed for as long as 4 weeks.
- Allergy medication will not cure sinusitis.
- Use acetaminophen or ibuprofen to ease pain. Do not use aspirin.
- Gently pressing a warm towel to the sinus areas may help ease pain.
- Your doctor might recommend using nose drops, a nasal spray, a decongestant, or an antihistamine.
- Putting a cool mist vaporizer in your child's room may help his sinuses drain.
- In cases of chronic sinusitis that are caused by problems with the way the nose is formed or caused by growths in the nose, surgery may be needed. These cases are rare.

How long does it last?

- Viral infections usually go away without treatment within 10 to 14 days.
- With medication, symptoms of a bacterial infection will usually improve within a few days. It may take weeks for the symptoms to go away.

Can it be prevented?

- Encourage your child to cover his nose and mouth when he coughs or sneezes.
- Wash hands often.
- Do not share eating utensils.
- Use a humidifier in the winter to help keep indoor air moist. Sinuses can be irritated by dry air. Clean the humidifier.
- Avoid smoking around children, especially if they are sick.
- People who smoke and have sinusitis should avoid smoking or try to quit.

When should I call the doctor?

- Call the doctor if your child has cold-like symptoms for more than 10 days.
- Call the doctor if your child has symptoms of sinusitis.
- Call the doctor if you have questions or concerns about your child's treatment or condition.

Quick Answers

- Sinusitis is when the sinuses get infected or irritated and cannot drain mucus as well as they should.
- Sinusitis can sometimes be caused by an infection or problems with how the nose is formed.
- Anyone can get it but children are more likely to get it than adults are. Children with allergies or asthma are at high risk.
- Symptoms include stuffy nose, aching and swelling around the eyes, stuffy head, low fever, and a dry cough.
- Sinusitis is not contagious.
- Take your child to the doctor if he has symptoms of sinusitis.
- With medication, the symptoms usually improve within a few days. It may take a few weeks for the symptoms to go away.
- To help prevent sinusitis, encourage your child to wash his hands often and to cover his mouth when he coughs or sneezes.
- Call the doctor if your child has cold-like symptoms for more than 10 days. This may be a sign of sinusitis.

References

- AAP. Clinical Practice Guideline: Management of Sinusitis. 108:3. 2001 September (cited 2002 June 5). URL: <http://www.aap.org/policy/0106.html>
- MEDLINEplus: Medical Encyclopedia. Sinusitis. <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/> 2002 January 23 (cited 2002 April 30).
- National Jewish Medical and Research Center. Sinusitis. <http://www.NationalJewish.org/> (cited 2002 April 30).
- Rutherford K. Sinusitis. KidsHealth. <http://kidshealth.org/> 2001 August (cited 2002 April 30).