

Acute sinusitis

This fact sheet helps you to know what's 'normal' and what you can expect to happen if you develop sinusitis. It also tells you when you should become concerned and seek advice from a health professional.

Useful facts

- **What are sinuses?** Sinuses are cavities in our face bones that open up into the nose, helping to control the water content and temperature of the air reaching our lungs.
- **What is sinusitis?** The body's response to irritants or bugs (inflammation) can lead to sinusitis: a swelling and irritation of the lining of the sinuses. Viral infections, such as the common cold, can cause the lining of the nose to swell, blocking the small opening from the sinuses to the nose. Fluid inside the sinuses may build up, which can make you feel bunged up and stuffy.
- **What types are there?** Sinusitis can be acute (resolving within 12 weeks) or chronic (lasting longer than 12 weeks).
- **What are the symptoms?** The most common symptoms include a blocked or runny nose, pain and tenderness in the face, and a raised body temperature. Additional symptoms are headache, cough, pressure in your ears, feeling generally unwell, bad breath, tiredness, and reduced taste and smell.
- **Are there any complications?** While the symptoms are unpleasant, the common cold is harmless. Complications, such as chest, ear and other infections, are rare.
- **Will I need antibiotics?** The symptoms of sinusitis usually get better on their own without treatment. Antibiotics are unlikely to help unless the symptoms are severe (see over the page).

What can I expect to happen?

- **Duration:** The symptoms of acute sinusitis last longer than the common cold and take about 2 ½ weeks to clear. Chronic sinusitis may last for months.
- **Need for treatment:** In most people, sinusitis will get better without treatment, and about two thirds of people with sinusitis won't need to see their GP.

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What can I do – now and in the future?

- **Simple measures:** Rest, applying warm face packs and washing out the nose with a steady stream of saline solution (available from your pharmacy) may help relieve your symptoms.
- **Fluids and food:** Drink plenty of fluids to replace those lost from sweating and a runny nose. Get some rest until you feel better – we usually know when we're well enough to return to normal activities. Eat healthily, including at least five portions of fruit and vegetables every day.
- **Over the counter medicines:** Paracetamol, ibuprofen or aspirin can help reduce the symptoms of sinusitis. Avoid giving aspirin to children under the age of 16 and follow the manufacturer's instructions. A decongestant preparation for your nose (for a maximum of one week) can help if a blocked nose is the problem.
- **Not recommended:** Complementary and alternative medicines, steam inhalation, and drugs such as antihistamines, mucolytics and steroids are currently not recommended, as there is no convincing evidence that they work.

When should I seek medical help?

Contact your GP surgery for urgent advice if you notice one or more of the following:

- You develop a high temperature (above 39°C or 102.2°F), which can be a sign of a more serious type of infection;
- You're confused or disorientated;
- You feel really unwell;
- You're at high risk of complications because you suffer other medical conditions;
- You suffer severe pain or discomfort in your face;
- Your nose produces lots of thick green/yellow fluid.

Where can I find out more?

Visit **NHS Choices** (<http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Sinusitis/Pages/Introduction.aspx>) or **Patient.co.uk** <http://www.patient.co.uk/health/Sinusitis-Acute.htm> for more information about sinusitis. Remember that your pharmacist can also assist you in assessing your symptoms.