

Relief for Sinus Misery

You've seen the guy in the television commercial who seems to have the worst cold in the world. He's really suffering – he's got a stuffy nose, headache, cough, and pressure inside his head and he can't sleep. Then he finds out he doesn't have a cold at all – he's got a sinus infection.

Healthy sinuses are lined with a moist, mucus-producing membrane and they normally drain nearly a quart of mucus daily, humidifying the air you breathe in the process. If the sinuses become blocked, infected, or swollen – say, following a cold – they can't drain properly and you're miserable. (Your chances of developing a sinus infection increase if you have hay fever, if you smoke, or if you have a nasal deformity.)

Symptoms include:

- A feeling of pressure inside the head.
- Nasal congestion and discharge (usually green, yellow, or bloody-colored). Foul-smelling or tasting postnasal drip.
- Pain in the upper jaw or cheek.
- Pain between the nose and lower eyelid.
- Severe headache which doesn't get better when you take an over-the-counter pain reliever. The headache is worse in the morning or when bending forward.
- Fever.
- Swelling around the eyes, nose, cheeks, and forehead.

A cool mist humidifier can help relieve sinus misery. Super-moist air helps to thin out the thick sinus secretions and loosen the mucus that has accumulated while your sinuses were out of order. Warm (or cold) compresses placed over the sinus area relieve discomfort still further.

Other measures that can help include:

- Drinking plenty of fluids to keep secretions thin and flowing.
- Taking an over-the-counter medicine for pain.
- Using over-the-counter oral decongestants. Use nose drops only for the number of days prescribed. Repeated use of nasal decongestants creates a dependency. Your nasal passages "forget" how to work on their own and you have to continue using drops to keep nasal passages clear. To avoid picking up germs, don't share nose drops with others. Throw the drops away after treatment.

If your symptoms persist despite home remedies, see a doctor. Sinus complications can be serious. You may need a prescribed antibiotic and a decongestant to clear a bacterial infection. A sinus passage that is too narrow to allow proper drainage may need to be enlarged with surgery.