



Breathe Easy Again: Your Guide to Understanding and Managing Sinusitis

If your stuffy nose lingers longer than expected, it might be a sign of sinusitis – a condition that affects 31 million people in the United States. Sinusitis, or a sinus infection, involves inflammation of the sinus linings, often due to infections or allergies. This condition can range from acute (lasting just a few weeks) to chronic (persisting for more than three months).

Many symptoms of sinusitis overlap with those of allergies, making it crucial to distinguish between the two for proper treatment. If you have allergies, you're more likely to develop sinus issues. In this brochure, we'll guide you on how to recognize the symptoms, manage your condition, and find the best treatments with your allergist's support.



Types of Sinusitis

Acute sinusitis is when your sinuses become inflamed for a short time, usually less than four weeks. It typically starts with a cold or allergies that make the tissues in your nose and sinuses swell, blocking the openings and causing pressure and discomfort. Most cases are caused by a virus,

but sometimes, if the blockage continues, it can develop into a bacterial infection.

Chronic sinusitis is when sinus symptoms last for more than three months. It can be linked to frequent infections, ongoing inflammation, or nasal polyps (harmless growths in the nose). Common causes include chronic allergies, environmental irritants like smoke, and infections. Generally, there are two types of chronic sinusitis: chronic sinusitis with nasal polyps and without nasal polyps.

What is a sinus?

A "sinus" is simply a hollow space. There are many sinuses in the body, including four pairs inside the skull – found in your forehead, at the bridge of your nose, far behind your eyes and at the apples of your cheeks. These are called the "paranasal sinuses." They lighten the weight of the skull and help give your voice its tone.

Symptoms

Sinusitis can cause a range of uncomfortable or unpleasant symptoms, including:

- Nasal congestion
- Discolored mucus
- Facial pain



- Headache
- Reduced sense of smell and taste
- Bad breath
- Ear pressure
- Cough and sore throat
- Fever and fatigue

Risk Factors

While anyone can experience a sinus infection, certain factors increase your risk:

- Nasal allergies and asthma
- Exposure to cigarette smoke
- Nasal polyps
- Structural issues such as a deviated septum
- Recent cold or respiratory infection
- Pressure changes like flying in an airplane or scuba diving
- Weak immune system

Diagnosing Sinusitis

Diagnosing sinusitis involves understanding your symptoms and using different methods to find the best treatment. Here's what your allergist might do:

Medical history and physical exam. Your allergist will ask about your symptoms – like how long they've lasted and any possible triggers

such as allergies or frequent colds. During the exam, they will check for:

- Redness and swelling in your nose.
- Tenderness or pain in your face.
- Discolored mucus coming from your nose.
- Bad breath, which can be a sign of infection

Allergy testing. If allergies are suspected, a skin test can identify what allergens might be causing your symptoms. Knowing the specific allergen helps guide your treatment plan.

Sinus CT scan. This test takes detailed pictures of your sinus cavities to check for any injuries, infections, or structural issues like nasal polyps or a deviated septum. This test is especially useful if your symptoms persist beyond three months or don't respond to treatment.

Nasal endoscopy. Your allergist may use a thin, flexible tube with a tiny camera to look inside your nose and sinuses. This procedure is quick, painless, and helps identify any blockages or other problems. You may receive a numbing spray to make it more comfortable.

Mucus cultures. If your sinus infection is chronic or hasn't improved after several antibiotic treatments, your allergist may take a mucus sample to identify the specific bacteria or fungus causing the infection.

Understanding the cause allows for more effective treatment, such as using targeted antibiotics or antifungal medications.



Common Treatments

The main goal of treating sinusitis is to clear the nasal passages and help the sinuses drain

properly. Treatments can range from home remedies to medications or even surgery, depending on the cause and severity.

Medications are the first line of treatment to reduce swelling and manage symptoms. Examples include:

- **Decongestants** such as nasal sprays or oral medications can reduce nasal swelling and improve drainage.
- **Prescription nasal sprays** help reduce inflammation and prevent the return of nasal polyps.
- **Antihistamines** control allergies that may be causing sinus problems.
- **Antibiotics** like amoxicillin should be used with caution and are only effective against bacterial infections. Your allergist may prescribe antibiotics if your symptoms persist beyond 7-10 days, if you have severe symptoms such as a high fever for three or more days, or if you have chronic sinusitis that has not responded to other treatments.

Saline nasal rinses or sprays help clear thickened mucus from the nasal passages, improving comfort and reducing symptoms.

Home remedies such as inhaling steam, applying warm compresses to the face, and drinking hot fluids can help relieve sinus pressure and improve drainage.



Biologics are recently approved by the FDA for the treatment of severe chronic sinusitis with nasal polyps. It can be an alternative treatment to sinus surgeries. Your allergist can discuss with you whether biologics over surgery are a good choice for you, and what biologic agent would be best.

Surgery might be recommended if medications and other treatments are ineffective, or if there are structural problems such as nasal polyps or a deviated septum. The procedure aims to improve drainage, remove obstructions, or correct structural issues, and is usually performed by an ear, nose, and throat (ENT) specialist who will work in partnership with your allergist.

Complications

Sinusitis, if left untreated, can lead to more serious health problems such as:

- Bacterial infections to nearby areas such as around the eyes and to the brain – causing conditions like meningitis.
- Worsening asthma symptoms and/or other chronic respiratory conditions like COPD.
- Chronic sinusitis, which may cause persistent inflammation, nasal congestion, and difficulty breathing.

If you experience worsening symptoms or suspect complications, talk with your allergist promptly. Proper treatment can help prevent these complications and improve your overall health.





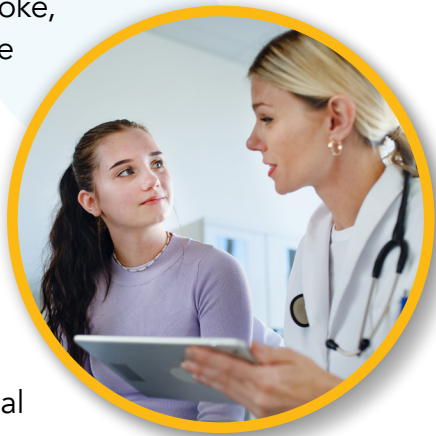
Talk with your allergist about other lifestyle changes that could help, such as staying hydrated, eating a balanced diet, exercising regularly, and managing stress. By taking these steps, you can reduce the risk of sinusitis and keep your sinuses healthy.

To learn more about sinusitis, visit acaai.org.

Prevention

While it's not always possible to prevent sinusitis, there are steps you can take to reduce your risk:

- Wash your hands frequently, especially during cold and flu season, and avoid touching your face to prevent infections.
- Stay away from known triggers that cause your nasal allergies to flare.
- Get recommended vaccines, such as COVID-19, RSV, flu, and pneumococcal vaccines to protect against respiratory infections that can lead to sinusitis.
- Don't smoke, and stay away from secondhand smoke, which can irritate the nasal passages.
- Use a humidifier to keep the air in your home moist and prevent nasal dryness.



Find an allergist. Find relief.

If you think you have sinusitis, speak with an allergist. They have specialized training and experience to make a proper diagnosis. In most cases, sinusitis is easy to treat. By stopping a sinus infection early, you avoid later symptoms and complications.

When should I see an allergist?

See an allergist if you have any of these conditions. Allergists treat two of the nation's most common health problems – allergies and asthma. More than 50 million people in the United States have these allergic diseases. Although symptoms may not always be severe, allergies and asthma are serious and should be treated that way. Many people with these diseases don't realize how much better they can feel. Allergists also treat conditions with similar symptoms, such as non-allergic rhinitis.

What is an allergist?

An allergist is trained to find the source of your symptoms, treat it and help you feel healthy. Life's too short to struggle with allergies or asthma. An allergist can help you find the answers you're looking for.

After earning a medical degree, the doctor completes a three-year residency training program in either internal medicine or pediatrics. They then finish two or three more years of study in asthma, allergy and immunology. The best way to manage your allergies or asthma is to see an allergist.