

# Sinus Pain or Congestion - Symptom

## Definition

- Fullness, pressure or pain on the face over a sinus
- Sinus pain occurs above the eyebrow, behind the eye, and under the cheekbone
- Other common symptoms are a stuffy or blocked nose or nasal discharge. Your child may also have a nasal drip down the back of the throat. This is called a postnasal drip.
- Also, may have a sore throat and throat clearing from postnasal drip

## Health Information

### Causes of Sinus Congestion

- **Viral Sinus Infection.** Part of the common cold. A cold infects the lining of the nose. It also infects the lining of all the sinuses. Nasal and sinus congestion occur together.
- **Bacterial Sinus Infection.** A problem when a sinus becomes blocked and infected with bacteria. This occurs in 2% of colds. It starts as a viral sinus infection. Main symptoms are increased sinus pain or return of fever. Thick nasal secretions that last over 14 days may point to a sinus infection.
- **Allergic Sinus Reaction.** Sinus congestion often occurs with nasal allergies (such as from pollen). Sneezing, itchy nose and clear nasal discharge point to this cause.

### Treatment of Sinus Congestion

- **Viral Sinus Infection.** Nasal washes with saline. Antibiotics are not helpful.
- **Bacterial Sinus Infection.** Antibiotics by mouth are needed.
- **Allergic Sinus Reaction.** Treatment with allergy medicines helps the nose and sinus symptoms.

### Color of Nasal Discharge with Colds

- The nasal discharge changes color during different stages of a cold. This is normal.
- It starts as a clear discharge and later becomes cloudy.
- Sometimes it becomes yellow or green colored for a few days. This is still normal for a cold.
- Thick colored discharge points to bacterial sinusitis ONLY if it occurs with other symptoms. These are:
- Sinus pain (not just sinus congestion) OR
- Swelling or redness over any sinus OR
- Return of a fever after it has been gone for over 24 hours OR
- Thick nasal discharge lasts over 14 days without improvement.

## Care Advice

### 1. Overview:

- Sinus congestion is a normal part of a cold. It usually clears up on its own.
- Usually, nasal washes can prevent a bacterial sinus infection.
- Antibiotics are not helpful for the sinus congestion that occurs with colds.
- Here is some care advice that should help.

### 2. Fluids:

- Try to get your child to drink lots of fluids.
- Goal: Keep your child well hydrated.
- It will thin out the mucus discharge from the nose. Also, it loosens up any phlegm in the lungs.

3. **Nasal Saline to Open a Blocked Nose:**
  - Use saline (salt water) nose drops or spray to loosen up the dried mucus. If you don't have saline, you can use a few drops of bottled water or clean tap water. Teens can just splash a little tap water in the nose and then blow.
  - STEP 1: Put 3 drops in each nostril.
  - STEP 2: Blow each nostril out while closing off the other nostril.
  - STEP 3: Repeat nose drops and blowing until the discharge is clear.
  - How often: Do nasal saline when your child can't breathe through the nose.
  - Saline nose drops or spray can be bought in any drugstore. No prescription is needed.
  - Saline nose drops can also be made at home. Use 1/2 teaspoon (2 ml) of table salt. Stir the salt into 1 cup (8 ounces or 240 ml) of clean water. You must use bottled or boiled water for this purpose.
  - Reason for nose drops: Blowing alone can't remove dried or sticky mucus.
  - Other option. Use a warm shower to loosen mucus. Breathe in moist air, then blow each nostril.
4. **Humidifier:**
  - If the air in your home is dry, use a humidifier. Reason: Dry air makes nasal mucus thicker.
5. **Decongestant Nose Spray (No prescription needed):**
  - Use this only if the sinus still seems blocked up after nasal washes. Also, only use for age 12 years or older. Use the long-acting type such as Afrin.
  - Dose: 1 spray on each side. Do this 2 times per day.
  - Always clean out the nose with saline before using.
  - Use for 1 day. After that, use only for symptoms.
  - Don't use for more than 3 days. (Reason: Can cause rebound congestion).
  - Oral decongestants (such as Sudafed) are not advised for children.
6. **Fever:**
  - For fevers above 102° F (39° C), give acetaminophen (such as Tylenol) or ibuprofen. Note: Lower fevers are important for fighting infections.
  - For ALL fevers: Keep your child well hydrated. Give lots of cold fluids.
7. **Pain Medicine:**
  - To help with the pain, give acetaminophen (such as Tylenol) or ibuprofen. Use as needed.
  - Try nasal saline first. Sometimes it alone relieves the pain. Reason: it removes dried mucus blocking the sinus opening and allows it to drain.
8. **Allergy Medicine:**
  - If the child also has nasal allergies, give an allergy medicine.
  - Long-acting allergy medicines (such as Zyrtec) are best. Reason: These meds do not cause your child to act sleepy. Age limit: 2 years and older.
  - A single dose of Benadryl can be given for any breakthrough symptoms.
  - No prescription needed. Age Limit: 1 year and older.
9. **What to Expect:**
  - With this advice, viral sinus congestion goes away in 7 to 14 days.
  - The main risk is a sinus infection from bacteria. This can occur if bacteria multiply within a blocked sinus. This leads to a fever and increased pain. A bacterial sinus infection will need antibiotics.
10. **Return to School:**
  - Sinus infections cannot be spread to others.
  - Your child can return to school after the fever is gone.
  - Your child should feel well enough to join in normal activities.

## Call Your Doctor If

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- Sinus pain lasts more than 24 hours after starting treatment
- Fever lasts more than 3 days
- Sinus and nasal congestion lasts more than 2 weeks
- You think your child needs to be seen
- Your child becomes worse

### **Pediatric Care Advice**

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