

# Cincinnati Allergy & Asthma Center

## Sinusitis

### What are sinuses?

The sinuses are cavities within the skull. They are present in the forehead cheeks and between and behind the eyes. They are connected to the nose through small tunnels that are little wider than a pinhead. Blockage of these tunnels (due to allergy, colds or polyps) often causes pain in the face. A blocked sinus cavity creates an environment that favors the overgrowth of bacteria, just like slime grows in stagnant water.

### How common are sinus infections?

Sinus infections often follow simple colds. Most viral infections ("colds") last less than a week. Longer-lasting symptoms often indicate nasal allergy or the development of a sinus infection.

### What are the symptoms of sinus infection?

- green / yellow mucus coming from the nose or down the back of the throat
- bad breath
- bad taste in the mouth
- sore throat
- losing the sense of smell or taste
- cough
- tiredness
- temperature or shivers
- sore upper teeth
- facial pain
- sensation of pressure that is worse with leaning forward.

### Why do people get sinus infections?

The most common predisposing factors include untreated allergy, twisted nasal anatomy, the overuse of decongestant nose sprays from the chemist and exposure to young children, who always seem to have a cold! Nasal polyps and smoking can predispose to infection. Diet plays no role in causing or preventing infection. A weak immune system is a very rare cause.

### How are sinus infections treated?

Early treatment with steam inhalations or salt water nose sprays will often help the infection to go away without needing to resort to antibiotics. When antibiotics are needed, the entire course must be completed. Encouraging people to stop smoking and treating their allergies makes it less likely that they will have future infections. Surgery is sometimes needed when medication does not help.