SINUS INFECTION
(Sinusitis)

BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION
Inflammation of the sinuses (air-filled cavities) adjacent to the nose. Sinusitis commonly affects the ethmoidal sinuses, located between the eyes; and the maxillary sinuses, located in the cheekbone. Germs that cause sinusitis are contagious.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS
Early stages:
- Nasal congestion with green-yellow (sometimes blood-tinged) discharge.
- Feeling of pressure inside the head.
- Eye pain.
- Headache that is worse in the morning or when bending forward.
- Cheek pain that may resemble a toothache.
- Post-nasal drip.
- Cough (sometimes) that is usually non-productive.
- Disturbed sleep (sometimes).
- Fever (sometimes).

Late stages:
- Complete blockage of the sinus openings, blocking the discharge and increasing pain.

CAUSES
- Infection (usually initiated by a cold or other upper-respiratory infection). The infection may be complicated by a bacterial invasion of organisms that normally inhabit the nose and throat.
- Irritation of the nasal passages from allergies, smoking, harsh sneezes with the mouth closed, chilling, swimming (especially jumping into the water without holding the nose) and fatigue.

RISK INCREASES WITH
- Illness that has lowered resistance.
- Smoking.
- Exposure to cold, damp weather outdoors and dry heat indoors.
- Exposure to others in public places.
- Immunosuppression due to illness or drugs.
- Swimming in contaminated water.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES
Prompt treatment of respiratory infections.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES
Usually curable with intense treatment. Recurrence is common.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS
- Meningitis or brain abscess (rare).
- Infection of bone or bone marrow (rare).

TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES
- Diagnostic tests (depending on severity of infection and chronicity) may include laboratory blood studies, culture of mucus, endoscopy, x-rays or CT scan of the sinuses.
- Treatment at home is aimed at improving drainage and control of infection.
- Use a cool-mist, ultrasonic humidifier to help thin secretions so they will drain more easily. Clean humidifier daily.
- For infants and young children who cannot blow the nose, use a nasal aspirator to suction each nostril gently before applying nose drops. Suction again 10 minutes after using nose drops.
- Apply moist heat to relieve pain in the sinuses and nose.
- Don’t allow other persons to use your nose drops. They will be contaminated by the infection. Discard them after treatment.
- Avoid non-prescription nose drops or sprays. Use prescribed drops only for the recommended time. They can interfere with normal nasal and sinus function and become addictive, causing a rebound phenomenon.
- Sinusitis not responding to other treatment may require surgery to drain blocked sinuses. Numerous techniques are available depending on the site of the infection.
- If the infection is severe, stay indoors in an even temperature.

MEDICATIONS
- Nasal sprays, nose drops or decongestant medicine to reduce congestion may be prescribed.
- Antibiotics to fight infection.
- For minor pain, you may use non-prescription drugs such as acetaminophen.

ACTIVITY
Resume your normal activities gradually. Exercise can help to clear your head.

DIET
No special diet, but drink extra fluids to help thin secretions.

NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF
- You or a family member has symptoms of sinusitis.
- The following occur during treatment: Fever; bleeding from the nose; severe headache. Swelling of the face (forehead, eyes, side of the nose or cheek).

Adapted from Instructions for Patients, Sixth Edition, H. Winter Griffith, M.D., W.B Saunders Company.