

Chronic Sinusitis March 2019 by Nancy Russell, M.D.

If you suffer from recurrent sinus infections or chronic runny nose, facial pressure and fatigue, you may be suffering from chronic sinusitis. Sinusitis is an infection in the air-filled cavities located behind and around the nose and eyes. The infection causes your nasal passages to swell shut, triggering symptoms such as headache, facial pain and fatigue. The swollen, blocked sinuses can develop a secondary bacterial infection, generating a lot of yellow-green mucous.

There are 2 types of sinusitis. Acute sinusitis is a sudden-onset, often after a cold, affecting 20 million Americans yearly. Chronic sinusitis is an ongoing, low-grade infection, with runny nose, postnasal drip, and repeated flare-ups of acute sinusitis. About 40 million Americans have this problem.

When you show up at urgent care or your practitioner's office with either acute or chronic sinusitis, you are likely to get a prescription of antibiotics 90% of the time. But the realization is dawning on practitioners that antibiotics don't always solve the problem so acute sinusitis many times leads to chronic sinusitis. A study from Finland involving 15,000 patients showed that patients with acute sinusitis typically get better in 2 weeks, whether they take antibiotics or not, and whether they use a steroid nasal spray or not.

Researchers are finding out that the adverse effects of repeated antibiotics are leading to drug resistance. Antibiotics don't get rid of 100% of bacteria. And those that survive can evolve into new generations of bacteria that can resist antibiotics. One example of this is the multi-resistant bacteria called MRSA, which can cause unstoppable staph infections of the skin. Worldwide, bacteria that cause many types of infections, from tuberculosis to bladder infections, are becoming antibiotic resistant.

There is another side effect of treating acute sinusitis repeatedly; the fact that antibiotics can eventually cause chronic sinusitis. Antibiotics don't specialize in bad bacteria. They target all the bacteria in your body, including the friendly bacteria that live in your digestive tract, and disrupt your microbiome. When the microbiome is in harmony, the friendly bacteria, aid in digestion, manufacturing vitamins, disarming toxins, and lending the immune system a helping hand. When those friendly bacteria are decimated, the fungus (yeast) *Candida albicans*, normally a well-balanced part of your digestive tract can multiply and overgrow. Another side effect of antibiotics is overgrowth of bacteria, called SIBO or small intestinal bacterial overgrowth. And that overgrowth of candida or other yeasts and bacteria doesn't confine itself to the intestines. It can also end up in your sinuses, causing chronic sinusitis that does not respond to antibiotics.

Antibiotics-sparked fungal overgrowth is the main, but little recognized cause of tens of millions of chronic sinus infections in the United States. It's also the reason why there are more and more of these infections, as the rampant use of antibiotics remains mostly uncontrolled. There was study published in the Mayo Clinic Proceedings a decade or

more ago that showed an inflammatory reaction to candida is likely the cause of many cases of chronic sinusitis.

How can you protect yourself if you suffer from acute or chronic sinusitis? Many sinus infections start out as a cold. When you have a cold or upper respiratory infection, it usually is caused by a virus. If it lingers and causes enough inflammation to totally close off the sinus cavities, this leads to an acute sinus infection. When you get a cold, there are several proactive steps to take. Take extra vitamin C 1000 to 5000 mg a day, avoid sugar and dairy to avoid thickening of the mucous and decrease the effectiveness of your immune system, use Mucinex or Sinatrol herbal supplement to thin mucous and boost the immune system, use a saltwater nasal rinse, and humidify the air in your home.

If the cold progresses to a sinus infection, continue the above remedies and consult a functional medicine provider to prescribe a unique compounded nasal spray or irrigation solution with prescription strength medications. These may include a topical antibiotic such as mupirocin or gentamycin, xylitol or other biofilm fighters, low dose steroid to shrink the swelling and an anti-fungal such as fluconazole or itraconazole. Adding a natural over the counter spray with colloidal silver may be helpful but no longer than 2-3 weeks. The prescription nasal spray usually needs to be used for 6 weeks and again if there is another infection. And remember to always add probiotics while using antibiotics or this nasal spray to replenish the microbiome. Take the probiotics at least 4 hours away for the spray or antibiotics for better results.

Other modalities to consider if the chronic sinusitis doesn't resolve is to assess your body for food allergies and food sensitivities as this can impact your ability to heal. For resistant issues, obtaining an alternative testing of the bowel movement to assess for beneficial bacteria, bacterial or yeast overgrowth or parasites. When obtaining the stool test, when an organism is identified, prescription and natural herbal treatments can be assessed for your particular type of infection. After balancing the microbiome, healing the leaky gut with bone broth, collagen or L-glutamine can be helpful.

My good friend recently lost his wife to a sinus infection that was resistant to all antibiotics which led to sepsis and her death. I want to help others prevent this type of tragedy. Be proactive in your health care journey, beginning today.