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# Sinusitis (sinus infection)

Sinusitis is swelling of the sinuses, usually caused by an infection. It's common and usually clears up on its own within 2 to 3 weeks.

Medicines can help if it's taking a long time to go away.

## Symptoms of sinusitis

Sinusitis is common after a [cold](#) or the [flu](#).

Symptoms of sinusitis include:

- pain, swelling and tenderness around your cheeks, eyes or forehead
- a blocked nose
- a reduced sense of smell
- green or yellow mucus from your nose
- a sinus headache
- a high temperature of 38 degrees Celsius or more
- toothache
- bad breath

Some of these symptoms can also be [symptoms of COVID-19 \(coronavirus\)](#).

Signs of sinusitis in young children may also include:

- irritability
- difficulty feeding
- breathing through their mouth

► [What are the sinuses?](#)

## Treating sinusitis yourself

You can usually treat mild sinusitis without seeing a GP by:

- getting plenty of rest

- drinking plenty of fluids
- taking painkillers like paracetamol or ibuprofen - do not give aspirin to children under 16
- holding a warm clean face cloth over your face for a few minutes several times a day
- rinsing your nose with a salt water solution to ease congestion

► [How to rinse your nose with a homemade salt water solution](#)

## Treatment for sinusitis from a pharmacist

A pharmacist can advise you about medicines that can help.

These include:

- decongestant nasal sprays, drops or tablets to unblock your nose
- salt water nasal sprays or solutions to rinse out the inside of your nose

You can buy nasal sprays without a prescription. They should not be used for more than a week without consulting your GP.

Some decongestant tablets also contain paracetamol or ibuprofen. Be careful when taking painkillers and a decongestant. Do not take more than the recommended dose.

### Speak to your GP if:

- your symptoms are severe
- painkillers do not help or your symptoms get worse
- your symptoms do not improve after 1 week
- you keep getting sinusitis

## Treatment for sinusitis from a GP

Your GP may be able to recommend other medicines to help with your symptoms.

These include:

- steroid nasal sprays or drops - to reduce the swelling in your sinuses
- antihistamines - if an allergy is causing your symptoms
- antibiotics - if bacteria is causing your symptoms and you're very unwell or at risk of complications

You often do not need antibiotics as sinusitis is usually caused by a virus.

Your GP may prescribe steroid nasal sprays or drops for a few months. They sometimes cause irritation, sore throats or nosebleeds.

Your GP may refer you to an ear, nose and throat (ENT) specialist if:

- these medicines do not help
- your sinusitis has lasted longer than 3 months (chronic sinusitis)
- you keep getting sinusitis

They may also recommend surgery in some cases.

## Surgery for sinusitis

Surgery to treat chronic sinusitis is called functional endoscopic sinus surgery (FESS).

This surgery is carried out under general anaesthetic (where you're asleep).

The surgeon can widen your sinuses by either:

- removing some of the blocked skin tissue
- inflating a tiny balloon in the blocked sinuses, then removing it

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