

FAST FACTS: Sinus Headache

The sinuses are air-filled connected spaces inside the forehead, cheekbones, and nose. The sinuses produce thin mucus which traps harmful particles like dust, pollen, and bacteria and the mucus then drains out through the nose. When sinuses get inflamed -- usually because of an allergic reaction or an infection -- they swell, make more mucus, and the channels that drain the sinus can get blocked.



✓ Causes of Sinus Headache

- About 80% of the time when individuals report they have a sinus headache it is a migraine with nasal symptoms.
- Sinus infections can cause sinus headaches. When mucus builds up in the sinuses it can cause a sinus infection by giving germs an opportunity to grow. This causes the sinuses to swell and block the mucus from draining. Swollen sinuses make the face tender and achy- causing the headache. The following are common causes:
 - The common cold.
 - Seasonal allergies which trigger increased mucus.
 - Nasal polyps (small flat bumps of tissue growth) can block mucus from draining.
 - Deviated septum (line of cartilage and bone down center of the nose)- when this is not straight it can prevent mucus from draining.

✓ Symptoms of Sinus Headache

- Deep, constant pain in areas of cheekbones, forehead, or bridge of the nose.
- Pain usually increases with sudden head movement or strain.
- Other symptoms may include stuffy or runny nose, fullness in the ears, face swelling, and/or fever.

✓ Management/Treatment

- Relieve symptoms and treat infection if one is present.
- Healthcare provider may prescribe antibiotics or recommend antihistamines or decongestants short term.
- May take OTC pain relievers like acetaminophen or ibuprofen. If these do not help, provider may prescribe corticosteroids to decrease inflammation in sinuses.
- Nondrug interventions that may help include drinking more fluids, using a humidifier or warm compress to painful areas, saline nasal spray.

✓ What Else You Should Do

- See your family member's healthcare provider any time they have a headache which does not go away or reoccurs.
- Write down and share information about your family member's pain with their healthcare provider.
- Use a [Pain Diary](#) to note important information useful to your family member's healthcare provider.
- Encourage your family member to try a non-drug treatment and document the impact on their pain in their Pain Diary.

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References

WebMD. (2022). *Sinus Headaches*. <https://www.webmd.com/migraines-headaches/sinus-headaches>

Cleveland Clinic. (2020) *Sinus Headaches*. <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/9641-sinus-headaches>.