

Family Medicine Clerkship Plain Language Summary Template

Title: Sinus Infections: To treat or not to treat?

Name: Erin Hennen

Plain Language Summary:

What is a sinus infection?

The sinuses are open spaces inside your skull. They are found behind your cheekbones, forehead, nose, and eyes. These spaces have an inner lining that helps to keep your sinuses clean and healthy. Normally these spaces do not have any germs and are open so that air can move through and mucus can drain out. However, if something blocks this opening, such as a cold or allergies, germs can begin to grow inside causing a sinus infection. When this happens, the lining becomes swollen, causing even more blockage and buildup.

Symptoms of a sinus infection

Sinus infections can present in many different ways. Some of the most common signs are a stuffy nose, thick drainage from the nose, pain in the cheekbones or forehead, fever, and a headache. Other less common signs include bad breath, loss of smell, cough, and a sore throat.



How to treat a sinus infection

Most of the time, a sinus infection will go away on its own. When a doctor sees a patient with signs of a sinus infection they will not usually give antibiotics. Studies have shown that antibiotics do not make the sinus infection go away more quickly. Most patients will feel completely better in two weeks without antibiotics. To help feel better at home you can drink lots of water and use steam throughout the day to help thin the mucus that is stuck in the sinuses. You can also put a warm washcloth to your face or take over the counter pain relievers to help with the facial pain. You can also try a saline spray to rinse out your nose. Be careful with nasal decongestants though as they can make the swelling worse if used incorrectly or for too long.

When to call the doctor

- If you are still not feeling better after 14 days with at home treatments.
- If you have a headache that won't go away with over the counter pain medications.
- If you develop a high fever.
- If you notice any changes in your vision or you have swelling around your eyes.
- If you develop a stiff neck.

These symptoms are rare but they may be signs of more serious problems and should be brought up to your doctor right away.

Additional Resources:

Sinusitis: National Institute of Health

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/PMH0001670/>

Acute Sinusitis: Mayo Clinic

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/acute-sinusitis/DS00170>

Sinus Infection: WebMD

<http://www.webmd.com/allergies/sinus-infection>

Key Words:

Sinus infections/sinusitis

Antibiotics

Nasal congestion/purulent discharge

Facial pain

Complications

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