

Plain Language Summary- Antibiotics for Acute Sinusitis

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What is sinusitis?

“Acute Sinusitis”, or sinus infection, is a common reason to visit the doctor. Sinuses are open spaces within the bones of your head. Most commonly we think of the ones that are on either side of your nose. Those are called the “maxillary” sinuses. They often are the place where an infection occurs.

How do I know if I have it?

When sinuses get infected, you might experience drainage from the nose that is yellow or green. You might have pain and pressure at the front of the face. Many people have a hard time breathing through their nose. Some people feel some drainage down the back of their throat. Other things can go along with sinusitis, like sore throat or cough.



What causes it?

Infections are either caused by viruses or bacteria. Your symptoms might also be caused by allergies or fungus. Antibiotics treat only bacteria. They do absolutely nothing against viruses! Unfortunately, there is no one good treatment for viral sinus infections. And, viruses are the most common cause of sinus infections. It is very difficult to tell the difference between an infection caused by a virus or bacteria. Your doctor will look for several signs that are more likely in people with bacterial sinus infections. One sign is if your symptoms have been

there for more than 7 or 10 days. This makes it more likely that the infection is caused by bacteria.

How do I treat it?

Even if your symptoms have been around for more than 7 days, they are still most likely caused by a virus. Your doctor might suggest some medicine that you can usually buy at your local drug store.

Using a humidifier or breathing steamy air in the bathroom can also help. Something called a Neti Pot can help, too. If your doctor thinks that your symptoms are caused by bacteria, they might suggest taking antibiotics. If your infection is due to bacteria, this medicine will help you get better faster!



Why don't I just take antibiotics every time?

This is a very common question. First of all, antibiotics won't help most sinus infections. That's because most of them are caused by viruses! More importantly, this medicine is not free of side effects and other problems. People can be very allergic to them. They can have a very bad reaction to this medicine. Antibiotics can make you sick to your stomach. Using antibiotics too much can also cause something called "microbial resistance". This means that the bacteria find ways to hide from the different types of antibiotics. Eventually, this might mean that there won't be a good medicine that works to treat an infection when it really is caused by bacteria. This can make you very sick for a long time.

I still have more questions!

Sinusitis:

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/sinusitis.html>

<http://www.niaid.nih.gov/topics/sinusitis/Pages/treatment.aspx>

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

Antibiotic Resistance:

<http://www.cdc.gov/drugresistance/index.html>

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