

Title: Sinusitis: Will Antibiotics Help You Feel Better Faster?

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Abstract: A sinus infection is inflammation or mucosal thickening of the sinuses and can be caused by bacteria, fungi, viruses or allergies. In 2/3 of people, it is caused by a virus and thus will not respond to treatment with antibiotics. In the event that the sinus infection is bacterial in origin, studies have shown that antibiotic treatment, nonetheless, does not decrease the duration of symptoms. In light of the lack of consistent evidence supporting the use of antibiotics for bacterial sinusitis and the fact that most sinus infections are viral in origin and will usually resolve within 7 days, antibiotic treatment should NOT be first line treatment in acute sinusitis.

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Sinus Infections: Worth the Wait Will Antibiotics Really Make You Feel Better Faster?

What Is A Sinus Infection and What Causes It?

A sinus infection is inflammation or mucosal thickening of one or more of the four sinuses that drain into your nose. It occurs in 90% of individuals who have an upper respiratory infection (a common cold). Sinus infections are viral in origin in up to 2/3 of people with sinus complaints and less commonly, are bacterial, fungal or allergic in origin. In most people, symptoms will substantially improve or disappear, with out the help of antibiotics, with in 7-10 days.

How Do You Know If You Have A Sinus Infection?

Acute Bacterial Sinusitis- caused by bacteria, can only be diagnosed by puncturing the sinus to obtain a sample of sinus fluid, which is rarely done.

Acute Sinusitis- diagnosed by your doctor based on your signs and symptoms with no sampling of nasal fluid. Usually requires that you have at least two of the major factors or one of the major factors plus two of the minor factors listed below.

Signs and Symptoms Your Doctor Will Look For

Major

Facial Pain or Pressure
Facial Congestion or Fullness
Nasal Obstruction
Colored Drainage from Nose
Decreased or Absent Sense of Smell

Minor

Headache
Bad Breath (Halitosis)
Fatigue
Dental Pain
Cough
Ear Pain or Pressure

What Will Your Doctor Do?

Initially, your doctor's goal will be to treat your symptoms. Your doctor will do this by prescribing you a 7 day course of decongestants and mucosolvents (drugs that reduce the thickness of your nasal drainage).

So When Are Antibiotics Appropriate?

Only 0.5-2% of people with a sinus infection following a cold will develop a bacterial infection. Thus, very few people with sinusitis will actually benefit from antibiotic therapy. If you still have symptoms after 7 days, your risk of developing or having a bacterial sinus infection is increased. In this case, your doctor may chose to prescribe you a 10 day course of antibiotics. The most commonly used antibiotic for sinus infections is currently Amoxicillin.

So Why Not Just Give Antibiotics To Everyone With Sinusitis?

- Have not shown to decrease duration of symptoms, even in those patients whose sinusitis is bacterial in origin.
- Viruses do not respond to antibiotics
- Antibiotics can cause bad side effects
- Inappropriate use of antibiotics leads to an increase in bacterial resistance

Sinus Infections: Chances Are You Don't Need Antibiotics

