

Sinus Headache

What is a sinus headache?

A sinus headache is a headache that occurs because your sinuses are swollen closed, congested with mucus, or infected. The sinuses are hollow spaces in the bones of your face. They connect with the nose through small openings. Like the nose, they are lined with membranes that make mucus. Mucus drains through the small openings to the nose.

What is the cause?

If you have a cold or allergies, the openings of your sinuses may be blocked by excess mucus or by swelling of the tissue that lines the sinuses. When drainage of mucus from the sinuses is blocked, the sinuses become congested. They may also become infected with bacteria, a virus, or even fungus. The infection can make the sinuses even more clogged. The pressure caused by swelling and congestion or infection causes sinus headaches.

Most sinus problems happen when you have had a cold. Often hay fever or irritation from dust or smoke causes swelling of the sinuses. Sometimes a tooth infection spreads to the sinuses.

If you have injured the bones in your nose or have a deformity of the nose that causes the sinuses not to drain properly, you may be more likely to get sinus congestion and infection.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms may include:

- Pain or pressure in the forehead or around the eyes and cheeks
- Tender skin and tender bones over and under the eyes.
- A feeling like your upper teeth hurt

Blowing your nose, bending forward, or jarring your head (as might happen when you jog or do aerobics) may make your headache feel worse.

How is it diagnosed?

Your healthcare provider will ask about your symptoms and medical history and examine you. Tests are often not needed but may include:

- X-ray of your sinuses
- CT scan, which uses X-rays and a computer to show detailed pictures of the sinuses.

How is it treated?

Acetaminophen, aspirin, or ibuprofen can help relieve pain.

- Check with your healthcare provider before you give any medicine that contains aspirin or salicylates to a child or teen. This includes medicines like baby aspirin, some cold medicines, and Pepto-Bismol. Children and teens who take aspirin are at risk for a serious illness called Reye's syndrome.
- Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory medicines (NSAIDs), such as aspirin or ibuprofen, may cause stomach bleeding and other problems. These risks increase with age. Read the label and take as directed. Unless recommended by your healthcare provider, do not take NSAIDs for more than 10 days for any reason.

Your healthcare provider may prescribe a decongestant. If your provider thinks you might have a sinus infection, he or she may also prescribe an antibiotic. Antihistamines may help if allergies are a cause.

Your head should stop hurting when the sinuses become less congested. This usually takes about 1 to 3 days after you start treatment.

How can I take care of myself?

- Avoid smoke, other inhaled irritants, and allergens, such as animal dander.
- Add moisture to the air with a humidifier or a vaporizer, unless you have mold allergy (mold may grow in your vaporizer).
- Inhale steam from a basin of hot water or in the shower to open up the sinuses and relieve pain.
- Put warm, moist washcloths on your face.
- Use decongestants as directed. Never use nonprescription nasal spray decongestants for more than 3 days. After 3 days they may cause your symptoms to get worse.
- Get plenty of rest and drink a lot of water to keep the mucus thin and runny.
- Elevate your head in bed, but only slightly.
- Take all of your medicine as prescribed.
- Ask your healthcare provider:
 - How and when you will hear your test results
 - How long it will take to recover
 - What activities you should avoid and when you can return to your normal activities
 - How to take care of yourself at home
 - What symptoms or problems you should watch for and what to do if you have them
- Make sure you know when you should come back for a checkup.

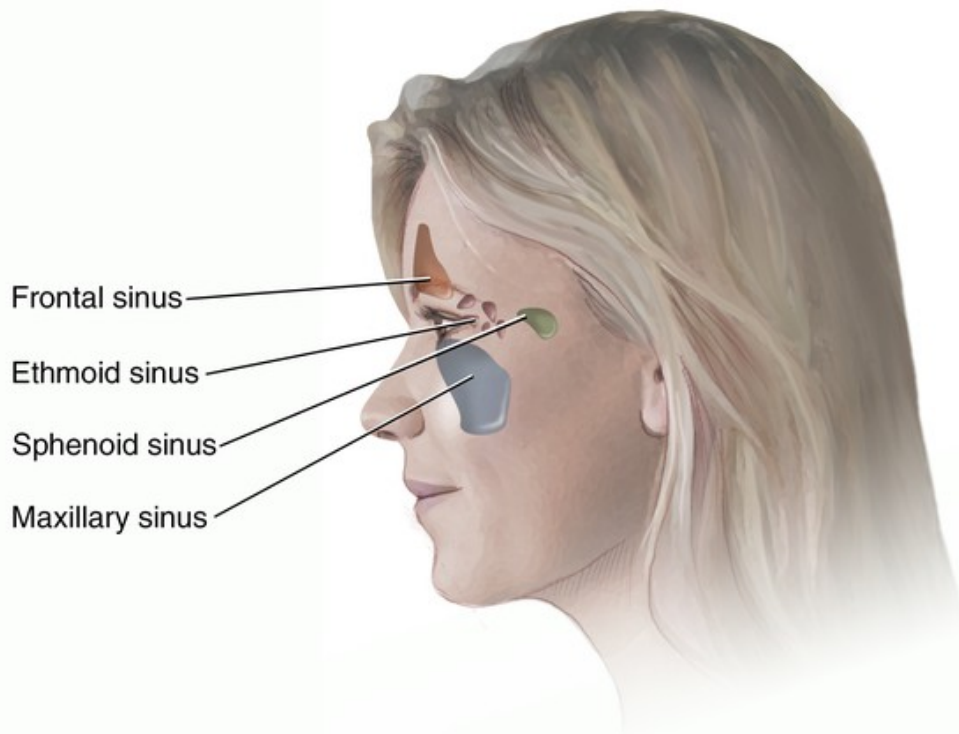
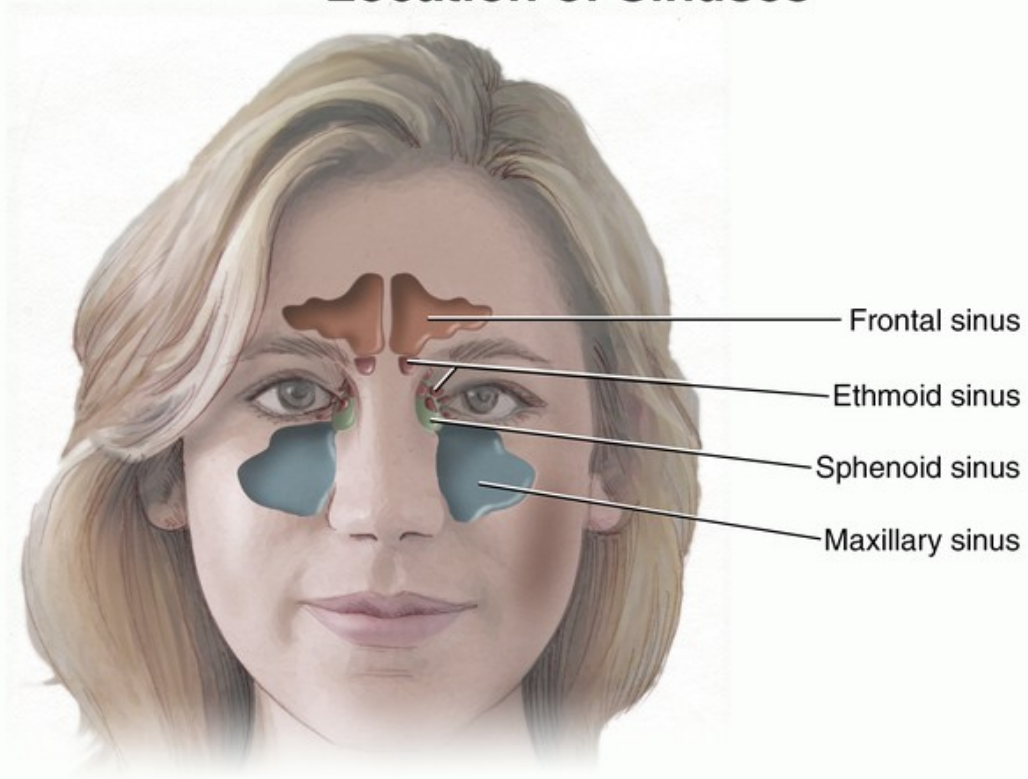
How can I help prevent sinus headaches?

- Treat the problems that might cause the headaches and congestion, such as allergies.
- Use oral or nasal decongestants before you fly, travel to high altitudes, or swim in deep water.
- Use a humidifier in your home if the air is particularly dry (for example, if you wake up in the morning with a dry mouth).

Developed by RelayHealth.

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Location of Sinuses



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