Sinus Headache

Your sinuses are air-filled spaces inside your forehead, cheekbones, and behind the bridge of your nose. When they get inflamed, usually because of an allergic reaction or an infection, they swell, make more mucus, and the channels that drain them can get blocked. The build-up of pressure in your sinuses causes pain that feels like a headache.

SYMPTOMS OF SINUS HEADACHE

You'll feel a deep and constant pain in your cheekbones, forehead, or the bridge of your nose. The pain usually gets stronger when you move your head suddenly, bend over, bend down or strain. At the same time, you might have other sinus symptoms, such as:

- A runny nose
- Feeling of fullness in your ears
- Feeling 'hard of hearing'
- Fever
- Swelling in your face
- Sneezing
- Coughing
- Sore throat
- Fatigue

Other kinds of recurring headaches, like migraines or tension headaches, are often mistaken for sinus headaches. Because the treatment you need depends on what kind of headache you have, it's important to figure out if your symptoms are caused by your sinuses. If a sinus blockage, such as an infection, really is the cause, you're likely to also have a fever. However, you can suffer sinus headaches without an infection, due to allergies caused by triggers, such as seasonal changes, animals, or dust for example. Acute sinusitis can become chronic over time.

DIAGNOSING A SINUS HEADACHE

Usually your physical therapist or doctor can tell if your sinuses are blocked based on the symptoms you describe and a physical exam. In some chronic cases, you may need a CT or MRI scan to access the extent of the damage in your sinuses, or presence of polyps which could be aggravating your condition.

TREATMENT FOR SINUS HEADACHE

The goal is usually to relieve your symptoms and treat an infection if you have one. You might take antibiotics, as well as antihistamines and decongestants for a short period of time. You can also take pain relievers, or if they don't help, your doctor can prescribe corticosteroids to ease the inflammation in your sinuses. If an allergic reaction causes your sinus flare-ups, you might need a preventative allergy treatment or maintenance dose of treatment through the period that triggers your symptoms (like the duration of spring, or a cold weather spell).

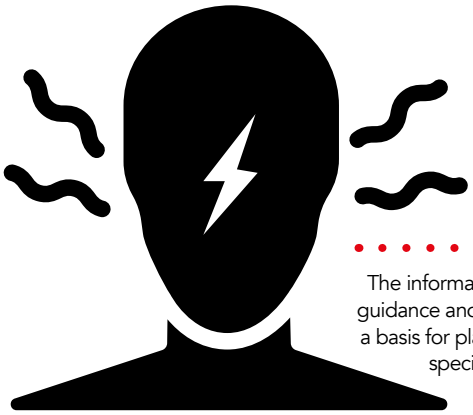
In rare cases, doctors may recommend sinus surgery to remove polyps or open small or constantly swollen sinuses.

Physical therapy can be effective in treating your sinuses, promoting healing and reducing pain and headaches.

Treatment options includes:

- Nebulisation – this loosens or thins the mucus secretions
- Laser and ultrasound - both treatments open the sinuses, increase blood flow and promote drainage. They help to move or drain the secretions loosened by nebulisation
- Manual mobilisation of your neck can help promote opening of the sinuses.
- Massage of the face, over the sinuses, relieves pain and stimulates blood flow which promotes healing and drainage which will relieve the pressure
- Dry needling can reduce pain and swelling, and improve circulation to your sinuses
- Acupuncture.

If you have suffered from a bad sinus attack or have chronic sinusitis you will know this is nothing to sniff at! It is a very debilitating condition and can inhibit your ability to concentrate, work, study and do daily chores and activities. It is also exhausting, often affecting your ability to sleep soundly.



Between, or following, a sinus attack you may benefit from a massage, even an aromatherapy massage with essential oils like eucalyptus or lavender. This can help relieve the stress and anxiety of having an attack.

THINGS YOU CAN DO AT HOME

- Stay well hydrated, drink lots of clear fluids like water
- Avoid caffeine and food with lots of MSG (mono-sodium glutamate, a flavour additive) or aspartame (artificial sweetener) as they can trigger allergies
- Avoid large amounts of dairy products, as they are associated with increased mucus production
- Use a humidifier, or try steaming yourself in the bathroom or under a blanket with hot water and some essential oils, like eucalyptus or peppermint
- Salt water nasal spray or nasal lavage can help flush your sinuses
- Avoid sinus triggers like alcohol, especially ones with higher sulphate levels like red wine
- Keep your house clean of dust and mould
- Be aware of some cleaning agents being triggers for allergies, you may need to try other organic brands
- Hot and cold therapy – alternating packs of hot and cold over your face can promote or increase circulation which will relieve pressure and pain, and improve sinus drainage
- Gentle self-massage of face and sinuses, your physical therapist can teach you how to do this
- Sleep in a propped-up position. Gravity will help drain your sinuses. Lying flat often makes it harder to breathe through a congested nose and mucus build up.

The information contained in this article is intended as general guidance and information only and should not be relied upon as a basis for planning individual medical care or as a substitute for specialist medical advice in each individual case.
©Co-Kinetic 2018

Daniel Näsman
daniel@massageterapeuten-gbg.se
https://www.massageterapeuten-gbg.se