

Acute sinusitis (adults)

This fact sheet helps you to know what's 'normal' and what you can expect to happen if you develop sinusitis. It also tells you when you should become concerned and seek advice from a health professional.

Useful facts

- **What are sinuses?** Sinuses are cavities in our face bones that open up into the nose, helping to control the water content and temperature of the air reaching our lungs.
- **What is sinusitis?** The body's response to irritants or bugs (inflammation) can lead to sinusitis: a swelling and irritation of the lining of the sinuses. Viral infections, such as the common cold, can cause the lining of the nose to swell, blocking the small opening from the sinuses to the nose. Fluid inside the sinuses may build up, which can make you feel bunged up and stuffy.
- **What types are there?** Sinusitis can be acute (resolving within 12 weeks) or chronic (lasting longer than 12 weeks).
- **What are the symptoms?** The most common symptoms include a blocked or runny nose, pain and tenderness in the face, and a raised body temperature. Additional symptoms are headache, cough, pressure in your ears, feeling generally unwell, bad breath, tiredness, and reduced taste and smell.
- **Will I need antibiotics?** The symptoms of sinusitis usually get better on their own without treatment. Antibiotics are unlikely to help unless the symptoms are severe (see over the page).

What can I expect to happen?

- **Duration:** The symptoms of acute sinusitis last longer than the common cold and take about 2 ½ weeks to clear. Chronic sinusitis may last for months.
- **Need for treatment:** In most people, sinusitis will get better without treatment, and about two thirds of people with sinusitis won't need to see their GP.

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