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Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol
Aneurin Bevan
University Health Board

Acute Sinusitis Advice

You have been seen and assessed within the Emergency Department and diagnosed with acute sinusitis. Sinusitis means inflammation of a sinus. Sinuses are air filled spaces seen in the bones of the skull/face. Most episodes of sinusitis are caused by an infection. The cheekbone (maxillary) sinuses are most commonly affected.

Infection develops quickly (over a few days) and many cases of acute sinusitis last a week but it is not unusual for it to last 2-3 weeks. Mild episodes of acute sinusitis are common and many people will have a degree of sinusitis with a cold. Acute severe sinusitis is uncommon.

Most people only ever have one or two bouts of acute sinusitis in their lives. However, some people have repeated (recurring) bouts of acute sinusitis.

What are the symptoms of acute sinusitis?

In adults:

- Pain and tenderness over the infected sinus. The pain is often throbbing and worse when you bend your head forwards. Chewing may be painful.
- Feeling of blocked ears.
- Nasal symptoms. You may have either:
 - A blocked nose. This may occur in one or both nostrils, sometimes with loss of smell. **OR**
 - A runny nose. Yellow or green discharge may mean infection.
- A high temperature (fever).

Other symptoms may include:

- Cough (day or night-time).
- Headache.
- Bad breath.
- Toothache.

In children, symptoms may also include:

- Irritability.
- Ear discomfort.
- Snoring.
- Mouth breathing.
- Feeding difficulty.
- Nasal speech.

How can you treat yourself?

If you have nasal obstruction and/or discharge from the nose and one of the following:

1. Facial pain/pressure
2. Reduction or loss of smell
3. Duration of symptoms is less than 10 days

Then viral sinusitis is the likely cause and antibiotics are not required. You are advised either to selfcare or to contact a pharmacy.

Selfcare treatment includes:

- Rest and sleep.
- Keep warm.
- Drink plenty of water.
- Pain killers such as Paracetamol and Ibuprofen (follow advice on the pack).
- Decongestant nasal sprays or drops may relieve a blocked nose but do not shorten duration of illness (do not use these medications >5 – 7 days as they may cause a worse rebound congestion in the nose)
- Avoid smoking – use nicotine alternatives.
- Clean your nose with a salty water solution.
- Warm face packs held over the sinuses may help to ease pain

The following symptoms are possible signs of bacterial infection, and you may require antibiotics.

- Symptoms lasting more than 10 days.
- Discoloured or purulent nasal discharge.
- Severe localised pain over the sinuses or teeth and jaw.
- Fever greater than 38°C.
- Worsening symptoms.
- Symptoms on one side of the face/nose.

Complications from acute sinusitis:

- Chronic sinusitis is the most common complication. It causes similar symptoms to acute sinusitis but lasts longer.
- Other complications are rare. However, they can be serious. Infection may spread from a sinus to around an eye, into bones, into the blood, or into the brain. These severe complications are estimated to occur in about 1 in 10,000 cases of acute sinusitis.
- They are more common with infection of the frontal sinus.
- Children are more prone than adults are to complications.

The following are signs of possible serious illness and should be assessed urgently

Please seek medical attention at your local Emergency Department if you have any of these symptoms:

- Swelling and redness around the eyes.
- Double vision
- Changes in eye movements (ophthalmoplegia)
- Reduced vision
- Signs of sepsis
- Signs of meningitis
- Confusion or you are very drowsy
- Vomiting
- Worsening headache
- Swelling to the forehead.

If you are at all concerned about your condition, please contact the Emergency Department at the Grange University hospital (01633 493287/493288) and not the Minor Injury unit.

Reference List:

http://www.rhinologyjournal.com/Documents/Supplements/supplement_29.pdf
Symptoms and signs | Sinusitis (acute): antimicrobial prescribing | Guidance | NICE
Sinusitis (sinus infection) - NHS

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