

Anyone who has suffered a bad head cold has experienced the pain and discomfort of blocked sinuses. In addition to the pain, there is also pressure and postnasal drip.

Now, imagine having to battle that condition chronically. That is what people whose sinuses don't drain properly must endure on a daily basis.

Hello. I'm Dr. Aliza.

Whether from an infection, or allergies, if the sinuses don't drain correctly, the persistent problem of sinusitis can develop. If you are one of the millions of people who suffer with this condition and didn't think there was help, then you'll be encouraged by watching *Managing Sinus Problems*. Meet patients who have conquered chronic sinusitis and find out what treatments made the difference.

Narrator

Kimberly Kraus had to work for every breath over a period of four years. She had sinus infections that would never go away.

Kimberly Kraus, Patient

“ I just was congested everyday. I could not breathe through my nose ever; I lost the sense of smell. It was miserable every day of my life for three or four years.”

Narrator

The aggravating symptoms of sinusitis brought Carla Orlando to doctor. While the search for answers continues, Carla's sinus problems seem to intensify.

**Carla Orlando
Patient**

“ I was having very bad sinus headaches and a lot of nasal congestion. I couldn't breathe through one side of my nose. I was having a lot of post nasal drip.”

Narrator

Karen Zacarias' sinusitis symptoms put her health at risk everyday she went to work. Karen spent much of her workday teaching children. So when her students were sick it didn't take long for her to come down with symptoms.

Karen Zacarias

Patient

“ It’s hard in the workplace for example, I used to miss work because I would have a severely acute sinusitis with asthma, not sleep all night and have to go to work, you know that type of thing, come in an hour later for work.

You’re intently aware of where your eyebrows are, your gums hurt because there is this pressure coming down from here and you can get headaches your eyes water up just because of the pressure. Other times you’re ok. You lose a sense of smell if you walk into the house you don’t, you can’t smell somebody’s cooking, or you can’t smell the perfume on your own hand.”

Narrator

The paranasal sinuses are a set of air filled cavities in the skull that surround the eye sockets. Doctors believe these air filled cavities have multiple health benefits.

Michael Kaliner, MD

Institute for Asthma and Allergy Chevy Chase, Maryland

“ The sinuses are open cavities in the skull probably to lighten the weight of the skull.”

Narrator

The sinuses, unlike the nose, are normally not colonized by bacteria. They are kept free from infection by tiny hair-like projections called cilia, which sweep mucus and bacteria out of the sinuses through small openings. However, after a cold, a viral infection, or another cause of inflammation these openings can become blocked allowing the growth of bacteria. As secretions accumulate within the clogged sinus, bacteria can multiply. This bacteria growth results in the inflammation, swelling, and pain characteristic of acute sinusitis.

Michael Kaliner, MD, Institute for Asthma and Allergy Chevy Chase, Maryland

“ When you breathe in it swirls around. Particulate material hits the wall of the nose it sticks to the mucus membrane the blanket of mucus that’s inside the nose and then everything that’s trapped in the mucus is carried back in a constant stream from the front to the back of the nose.”

Narrator

Patients complain of headaches over sinus area which often intensifies with head movement. Since one set of the sinuses lies directly above the upper jaw when those are inflamed many patients complain of what feels like a toothache.

Tabatha Adams, Patient

“ You can’t let it effect you. I mean if you’ve got a fever you’ve got to be there at work. You can’t miss work just because you’re feeling ill you’ve got to pick yourself up and you’re a little slower than you normally are. You’re productivity isn’t there you’re not as good as you normally would be so you need to fix the problem.”

Narrator

The sinus symptoms can be so severe that patients are forced to alter work schedules as well as private life. 44-year old attorney Heitzi Epstein had to give up practicing law with a firm and can only do limited projects now in her office at home. She’s had a number of health problems and now doctors are trying to determine why she continuously has recurrences of sinus infections.

Exercise and recreational sports activities had to be almost completely cut out in order for Karen Zacarias to stay healthy. She still wants to join in the fun but it has to be small moderate amounts to prevent her sinusitis from flaring up.

**Karen Zacarias
Patients**

“ I can’t go deep into the water I can’t swim as other people can. Even though I used to be a very good swimmer now I have to be careful about swimming. And air travel with the pressure in your ears. It just means that I have to prevent getting sick colds, flu etc. If I get that it can turn into bronchitis very quickly.”

**Michael Kaliner, MD,
Institute for Asthma and Allergy Chevy Chase, Maryland**

“ Of the things that cause chronic cough. Sinusitis certainly accounts for between 25 and 40 percent of patients that we see with chronic cough. The characteristics is that they cough with drainage down the back of the throat. But because when you lie down you’re also emptying your sinuses into your throat it’s associated with a night cough.”

Narrator

So how do you know if a runny nose and cough represents sinusitis or just a bad cold. We'll have the answers after this break.

Narrator

Patients often wonder how long a cold should last. It's easy to believe that your cold is just taking a long time to get over. But if the symptoms persist you may have something more troublesome.

Michael Kaliner, MD, Institute for Asthma and Allergy, Chevy Chase, Maryland

“Colds last about 5 to 7 days. So if you get a cold you should get better in a week or so. So let's just say it goes to 10 days as the upper limit of maximum for a cold.”

“A cold that persists more than 10 days is not a cold you've got something that's going on that's causing prolonged symptoms usually that's sinusitis.”

Narrator

Sinusitis is usually diagnosed by taking a careful study of a patient's medical history and looking for the symptoms indicating an inflammation of the sinuses. These symptoms include a chronic cough or post nasal drip, nasal congestion, nasal secretion seen in the nose or throat and a feeling of fullness or pain over the sinus cavities.

**Michael Kaliner, MD
Institute for Asthma and Allergy, Chevy Chase, Maryland**

“We do transillumination relatively regularly certainly not in every patient. We take a bright light we put it on the cheek and look at light coming through the roof of the mouth. So the maxillary sinus which is the cavity just beneath my fingers here is here and it also makes the roof of the mouth. So light should when it's placed here in a dark room be visible on the roof of the mouth.”

Narrator

A rhinoscopy is a procedure to examine the back of the nose. This examination allows direct visualization of the openings to the sinuses, and in most cases the diagnosis of the sinusitis can be made directly.

Michael Kaliner, MD**Institute for Asthma and Allergy, Chevy Chase, Maryland**

“ The procedure is painless. We spray with an anesthetic we open up the nose with a decongestant and then we can see pretty well and have no problems visualizing most of the nose people feel some pressure but not really pain and it gives me in about three minutes a very complete picture of what’s going on inside the nose.”

Narrator

X-rays are another tool used to aid in the diagnosis of sinusitis. A normal sinus is visible as a clear air-filled cavity on x-ray, but an infected fluid filled sinus appears cloudy, giving doctors yet another indication the patient’s complaints may be the result of sinusitis.

CAT scans are also used as a diagnostic tool to detect the thickening of the sinus membrane lining and confirm the diagnosis of sinusitis.

Michael Kaliner, MD**Institute for Asthma and Allergy, Chevy Chase, Maryland**

“ The cat scan of the sinuses is what we call the gold standard. So it’s the diagnostic procedure that we compare everything else too and therefore it has a value of 100-percent. When we do a cat scan it is extremely diagnostic. We’re able to see the sinus completely and it’s the only test that I ever need. If I want to confirm sinusitis I don’t have to go past the cat scan.”

Narrator

If left untreated an acute case of sinusitis can lead to a recurring problem or chronic sinusitis. That can be more than just annoying, it can severely impact on your quality of life. But simple lifestyle changes can make a world of difference and help deal with sinusitis. We’ll take a look when we come back.

Narrator

Sinusitis patients have been known to suffer with the symptoms and some pain for up to ten years. Whether acute or chronic dealing with this condition for over a decade can impair a person’s ability to function normally.

Judith Adams, Patient

“ My major complaint and what brought me in today is just the sneezing not sneezing as much as runny nose post nasal drip that kind of thing and of course when I have the post nasal drip that does effect that does go into my chest so I kind of watch very carefully.”

Tabatha Adams, Patient

“ Normally I would meet friends after work or for dinner or meet them at lunch but at lunch time I’m always so tired or at night I’m always so tired I just want to go to bed so I was not socializing as much as I normally would.”
“ It’s just a little bit harder you have to push yourself a little harder. So that’s why I’m here so I can fix the problem and live a normal life.”

Narrator

If the symptoms seem to be triggered by an allergy, avoidance of those allergens, treatment with allergy medications or allergy tests may be appropriate.

Environmental irritants and cigarette smoke can also enflame the membranes of the nose and sinuses. Stop smoking altogether and avoiding secondhand smoke can help prevent sinusitis in sensitive people.

Michael Kaliner, MD
Institute for Asthma and Allergy, Chevy Chase, Maryland

“ Smoke paralyzes the cilia, and so if you’re a smoker, every time you smoke a cigarette the cilia inside your nose and sinuses is paralyzed for about 20-30 minutes. Passive smoking also has an impairment on cilia functions so if your in a smoky environment your cilia won’t work as well and that reduces the capacity of the nose to protect the nose, sinus’s and lungs from getting infected.”

Narrator

Coming up next. We’ll take a look at the different ways to treat chronic sinusitis.

Narrator

The first goal of treatment for sinusitis is to decrease the swelling and inflammation of the mucus membranes in the nose and sinuses. Reducing the swelling can be accomplished using several techniques.

Michael Kaliner, MD

Institute for Asthma and Allergy, Chevy Chase, Maryland

“ If they have allergic rhinitis I’ll give you an oral antihistamine to reduce the histamine related itching sneezing and runny nose. If they have non-allergic rhinitis or sometimes if they have allergic rhinitis I use a spray antihistamine called astellin. I’ll often use an oral antihistamine or a nasal spray antihistamine in conjunction with a nasal steroid spray and also nasal irrigation. Those three things are the way I approach nasal and sinus disease.”

Martha White, MD

Institute for Asthma and Allergy, Washington D.C.

“ I prefer to use non sedating antihistamines on my patients at least in the daytime because of the problems with work performance, school performance or driving. In fact in some states getting caught driving with a sedating antihistamine has the same implications as driving while drunk.”

Narrator

Nasal sprays are used to reduce inflammation and help restore normal sinus drainage.

Michael Kaliner, MD

Institute for Asthma and Allergy, Chevy Chase, Maryland

“ What we prefer to use are spray nasal steroids that work on the nose... so use a spray nasal steroid that has a high concentration on the nose, sinus and polyps but very little or none of it gets into the body and we’re not worried about the kinds of systemic effects that we get when we take an oral steroid.”

Narrator

The next goal is to reduce the symptoms such as a runny nose.

Michael Kaliner, MD

Institute for Asthma and Allergy, Chevy Chase, Maryland

“ To try to reduce the symptoms and primarily that means to reduce congestion to wash out the sinuses in the nose and to get rid of any mucus that may be impacting the nose. To try to get rid of the itching, sneezing and runny nose that goes along with it.

Usually that involves a combination in our case of nasal washing and irrigating solution that washes the nose and sometimes we design it to wash the sinuses as well.”

Narrator

Another goal of treatment is to eliminate the infection.

Michael Kaliner, MD

Institute for Asthma and Allergy, Chevy Chase, Maryland

“ The routine has been to use an antibiotic for everybody who has acute sinus infections. Antibiotics work 90 to 95 percent of the time and that is with conjunction with a decongestant to open up the nose, irrigation, a nasal steroid, plus an antibiotic almost everybody gets completely well with acute sinusitis.”

Narrator

Antibiotic treatments usually take five to ten days and most patients’ recover when they are treated with the proper medications. Patients are advised to take all the antibiotics they are given and do not stop because symptoms seem to disappear.

Karen Zacarias, Patient

“ We’re trying to keep it as low maintenance as possible the least medicine as possible . I take decongestants twice a day, nasal irrigations and topical steroids. That’s a daily basis whether I’m well or sick. When I get sick everything get’s upped.”

Tabatha Adams, Patient

“ That is a lot of demand twice daily especially with what I do normally you work all day and come go to sleep and get up work the next morning so it’s a little demanding but I’ll try it so I don’t get those fevers that put you out of commission.”

Narrator

If medical treatments don’t work surgery may be the only alternative left.

Jack Anon, MD

University of Pittsburgh College of Medicine

“ Surgery is usually indicated for the patient who has chronic sinus disease with persistent symptoms of nasal congestion, colored nasal drainage, as well as post nasal drip that’s not responded to a course of antibiotic therapy as well as nasal cortisone spray. Other indications for surgery include the patient who has polyps which block the nose and sinuses.”

Michael Kaliner, MD

Institute for Asthma and Allergy, Chevy Chase, Maryland

“ I send patients to surgery almost always because of polyps that they can’t control. Beyond that with patients who have sinus infections I’m usually able to control them without need for surgery. Over the course of a year I might send five percent of our patients that we take care of for surgical procedures because the polyps have been reoccurring or I can’t shrink them down adequately medically.”

Narrator

The most common surgery done is the functional endoscopic surgery. The endoscope gives doctors a better view inside the sinuses. In this procedure the doctor removes small amounts of bone or material blocking the sinuses as well as removal of growth on the mucous membranes known as polyps.

Jack Anon, MD

University of Pittsburgh College of Medicine

“ The use of the fiber optic endoscope increased our ability to see inside the nose and thus surgery can now be performed directly through the nose where the sinus drain area is directly approached and blockage is able to be removed using delicate instruments allowing the sinuses to then drain better thus relieving the patient of their symptoms.”

Kimberly Kraus

Patient

“ I actually expected the surgery to be a lot worse than it was for me and it did wonders. I can breathe again through my nose. I can smell it’s wonderful. I mean always had a box of tissue with me and I haven’t had to blow my nose or anything. I’ve been great.”

Narrator

For the 95 percent of patients who will not have surgery the treatments to relieve the symptoms of sinusitis are ones very likely to be used routinely throughout the patient’s life. So patient compliance with doctor’s orders is essential to sinus health.

Michael Kaliner, MD

Institute for Asthma and Allergy Chevy Chase, Maryland

“ Patient compliance is always a problem in every circumstance. What happens is that human nature is that patients are sick they’ll do anything you ask them to do when they are sick. As soon as they feel well they stop doing everything and then they are surprised that the disease comes back.

Part of the reason I see patients on a regular basis is to reinstitute the need for chronic treatment or warning them that the disease will come back just like it did before if they stop treating themselves.”

Narrator

Compliance demands that patients follow their treatment regime no matter how they feel throughout the year.

Heitzi Epstein, Patient

“ I would like to be able to breathe and exercise and do all the normal things I was planning on doing at this time in my life and I’d like to go back to work too I’m part time but I’d like to go back to work.”

Judith Adams, Patient

“ I don’t know what it would be like frankly if I didn’t take those measures and the medicine that I take because I’m so religious about taking it. But it works and I know how much better I feel now than I did before I’m not going to go backwards.”

Carla Orlando, Patient

“ I spend a lot more time doing the things I want to do because I’m not ill. I can breathe through my nose now.”

Karen Zachariah, Patient

“ I used to get sick the first two years I was sick maybe 180 days of the year. I mean literally just sick coughing. Now I’m sick ten days out of the year so I’d change that any day so that’s worth it.”

Narrator

Bottom line both doctor and patient must work together. There are proven procedures to manage sinusitis, but discipline is required to stick to the treatment routine, avoid environmental allergens, stay healthy and enjoy life indoors and outdoors.