

Sinus Infections: Put an End to the Suffering

By Trudie Mitschang

IT MAY BEGIN with tenderness, a dull headache and postnasal drip. Your eyelids may swell, and you may experience a sore throat and increasing fatigue. As anyone living with primary immunodeficiency (PI) can attest, these common recurring symptoms often mean only one thing: yet another sinus infection. Even with regular immune globulin therapy, for many patients, chronic sinusitis is a painful condition that just seems to linger. The good news is, armed with the right information, many medical interventions and at-home remedies can make sinus infections more manageable.

Understanding Sinusitis

Sinusitis is inflammation and infection of the sinus cavities. There are four pairs of sinus cavities known as the paranasal sinuses, and one or more of them are usually to blame when sinus pain ensues:

- Frontal (above the eyes)
- Maxillary (inside the cheekbones)
- Ethmoid (behind the nose and between the eyes)
- Sphenoid (upper part of the nose behind the eyes)

Sinuses perform their job by providing an opening into the nose that allows air and mucus to pass. But, if the sinuses become blocked with drainage, it can lead to pressure on the sinus walls. A blockage caused by inflammation can prevent air from entering, leading to more pain and pressure.

Sinusitis is often triggered by a bacterial infection that may have been preceded by a common cold or viral infection. The most common organisms causing these infections include *Streptococcus pneumoniae* and *Haemophilus influenzae*. Unfortunately, individuals living with PI are at increased risk for sinusitis from other organisms and fungus. For an accurate diagnosis, it's important to receive treatment from a practitioner familiar with the link between PI and sinusitis.

Medical Intervention, Prevention and At-Home Treatment

Chronic sinusitis is often diagnosed with a CT scan. Once a diagnosis is made, you may be given a course of antibiotics or other prescription medication. In some cases, a referral to an ear, nose and throat specialist may be warranted. In severe cases, the physician may recommend sinus surgery to open

and drain sinus passages and remove any polyps. Follow-up care requires dedicated and regular sinus irrigation to keep the tissues clean and moist and to maintain positive results.

While PI patients cannot ultimately prevent bouts of sinusitis, certain lifestyle choices may help. Some experts recommend home air purifiers to reduce allergens and pollutants that can cause sinus irritations. In addition, it may be wise to limit alcohol consumption because it can inflame nasal passages, use a humidifier at home and at work, and wear a mask when in highly polluted environments to limit exposure to allergens and triggers.

Easing Symptoms

Symptomatic treatment of a sinus infection does not shorten the duration of illness, but it can make you feel a lot better while you wait for the infection to pass.

Pain relief. Nonprescription pain medications such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen can relieve headache pain and pressure.

Nasal irrigation. Flushing the nose and sinuses with a saline solution several times per day has been proven to decrease pain associated with congestion and shorten the duration of symptoms.

Nasal steroids. Nasal steroids can help to reduce swelling inside the nose, usually within two to three days.

Oral decongestants. Decongestants, including pseudoephedrine and phenylephrine, may be helpful if you have associated symptoms of ear pain or fullness.

Nasal decongestant sprays. These sprays can be used to temporarily treat congestion but should not be used for more than two to three days due to the risk of rebound congestion.

Mucolytics. Medications that thin nasal secretions (such as guaifenesin) may help to clear mucus and relieve pressure.

Additional home remedies such as steam from facial vaporizers can offer relief from sinus pain and pressure, as can warm compresses applied to the face and eye area.

While chronic sinusitis is likely a constant companion for those diagnosed with PI, learning as much as you can regarding prevention, symptoms and treatment options can make these nuisance infections a bit easier to endure. ■

TRUDIE MITSCHANG is a contributing writer for *IG Living* magazine.



Soothing Solution

Ayr Saline Nasal Gel with soothing aloe incorporates a high concentration of aloe to soothe irritated nasal tissues to help relieve discomfort. A single application around the nasal cavity and nostrils can provide relief for up to six hours. It can also be used before bedtime to keep the sinuses clear while sleeping. \$7.29; cvs.com



Humidify on the Go

VAVA Cool Mist Humidifier fits easily into a variety of tight spaces, from cubicles to small bathrooms. The slim shape and lightweight tank also make water refills easy. It features a 360-degree nozzle to control airflow. \$47; amazon.com

Shopping Guide to Sinusitis Products

A Gentle Cleanse

Alkalol Natural Soothing Nasal Wash Mucus Solvent and Cleaner helps remove unwanted mucus. The mixture of menthol, eucalyptol, spearmint, pine and cinnamon leave the sinuses clear from congestion for hours. The all-natural solution causes no side effects, so it is ideal for children. \$6.69; vitacost.com



Inhaled Relief



The Benedrex Vapor Inhaler provides temporary relief of nasal congestion caused by sinusitis, hay fever or the common cold. Formulated with propylhexedrine, lavender oil and menthol, it promotes nasal and sinus drainage and temporarily relieves sinus pressure. \$13.99 (pack of three); amazon.com

Netti Pot Prevention

NeilMed NasaFlo Neti Pot Sinus Relief with Premixed Packets (50 count) help relieve postnasal drip and dryness caused by allergies and can be used for daily irrigation to moisturize and help prevent nasal irritation. The packets can be mixed with lukewarm filtered, distilled or previously boiled water. \$13.99; target.com



Full Steam Ahead



Mabis Personal Steam Inhaler provides relief from sinus congestion, colds and allergies. Offering a natural approach to chest congestion, the inhaler also can be infused with aromatherapy steam. \$26.99; walmart.com