

BE WELL

Soothe Your Aching Sinuses

By Debbie DeAngelo

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Your face is throbbing, and you can't breathe through your nose. Your head feels like it's about to explode. And you never knew it was possible for all of your teeth to hurt at one time. Yep ...it's your sinuses.

Sinus pressure is a pain. Literally. Normally you don't even know these hollow facial cavities exist as they go about their job of warming, humidifying and filtering the air you breathe – until they're unhappy. Whether due to infection, allergies or air pollutants, sinus pressure occurs when the membranes that line your nasal passages and sinuses become irritated and inflamed. Often this is accompanied by a buildup of mucus that doesn't drain properly. The pain is felt over the area of the affected sinuses, which would be across the forehead and cheeks, as well as behind the eyes and nose. It also commonly radiates to the jaw, teeth and scalp. No matter how you look at it, when your sinuses are bothering you, it's downright miserable.

Identifying the underlying cause of your reactive sinuses is instrumental in eradicating these episodes. In the meantime, there are several home remedies that can ease discomfort.

Self-Help Strategies

Press. There are several acupressure points on the face that you can massage to deflate the buildup of sinus pressure and elicit drainage. The locations of some of these points include just above the bridge of the nose, between the eyebrows; between the bridge of the nose and the inner edge of the eyebrows; and at the base the cheekbones. Gently but firmly rub these areas in a circular motion for about three minutes.

Inhale. Inhaling steam helps to thin out the accumulated mucus and assuage those fired up sinuses. The most convenient methods are to simply take a hot shower and to run a humidifier, especially while sleeping. Making a steam tent works too. Pour boiling water into a bowl, drape a towel over your head, and lean over the bowl to breathe the steam. Be extremely careful to avoid burning your face.

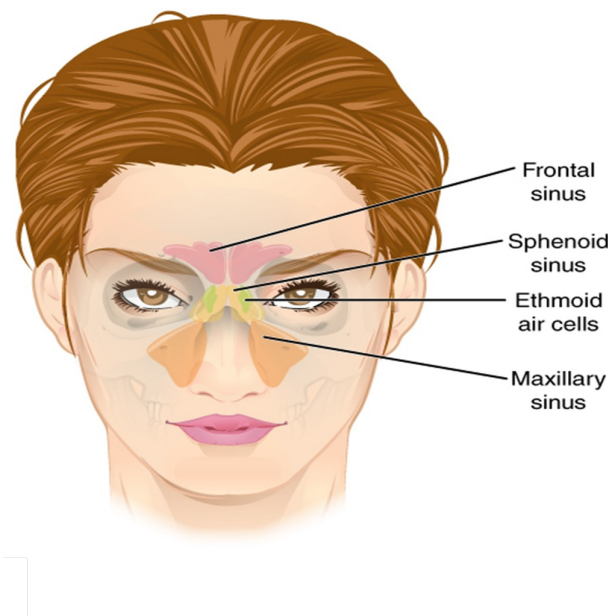
Rinse. Nasal irrigation is enthusiastically embraced by those with chronic sinusitis. It moistens the nasal membranes and relieves sinus pressure. The solution washes away irritants and decreases inflammation. Rinsing the sinuses can be accomplished via a Neti pot (a device resembling a teapot that is used to pour a saline solution in one nostril and out the other) or an over-the-counter saline nasal spray.

Sniff. Aromatherapy can be remarkably effective at opening the sinuses and easing congestion. One of the most promising compounds for this purpose is menthol. Found in peppermint and Vick's VapoRub, this strong-smelling substance facilitates nasal drainage, which in turn relieves the pressure. You can either take a few whiffs of the essential oil of peppermint, mix a drop in a teaspoon of oil (coconut, olive) and lightly rub it onto your cheeks and forehead, or add a few drops of peppermint and eucalyptus oil to the water of your steam tent. As for the Vicks, a small amount beneath your nose or on your cheeks will get the mucus flowing.

Elevate. Ever wonder why your sinuses feel stuffier when lying down? Reclining in a flat position increases mucus buildup and pressure. When your sinuses are full and uncomfortable, prop yourself up with pillows to keep your head above your heart while sleeping.

Spice. Foods that normally make your nose run while eating them are your go-to, stuffy-sinus friends. Hot sauce, horseradish, cayenne, and wasabi are good choices. Since drinking plenty of fluids helps to thin out mucus too, spicy foods will aid in this goal as well.

Medicate. Over-the-counter medicine can ease uncomfortable symptoms but the one you choose may depend on the source of your sinus pressure. Check with the pharmacist to determine whether you could benefit from a decongestant, antihistamine, or steroid nasal spray.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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