

For millions of people, it is a special, unforgiving kind of pain: intense headache. Facial pain. Teeth hurt. A sense of unrelenting compression. And it even has an unfriendly sounding name: *sinusitis*.

“Sinusitis can affect everyone, young and old, strong and weak,” says Dr. Dave Judge of the Allergy, Asthma and Sinus Center in Cary, North Raleigh, and Wake Forest. “It makes grown men cry, and consigns some people to bed, facial compresses in place. For many, sinusitis is a trial. The good news is that, once properly diagnosed, it can be treated effectively.”

Sinusitis is a failure of an important drainage system in our heads, says Dr. Judge, who set up his practice in Cary in 1994, after completing a two-year allergy-immunology fellowship at Duke University Medical Center. He is also board-certified in pediatrics.

The bones around the nose contain the paranasal sinuses, he explains—“which are hollow chambers with openings for drainage

## Millions Suffer With Pain of Sinusitis



Dr. Judge begins the not unpleasant task of discovering the cause of this patient's symptoms.

### SINUSITIS AND CHILDREN

As a pediatrician as well as an allergist-immunologist, Dr. Judge has a special interest in treating children with respiratory problems such as asthma, allergies, and sinusitis. There are tell-tale signs of a sinus infection with a child, he says, including:

- a “cold” lasting more than 10 to 14 days, sometimes with a low-grade fever and thick, yellow-green nasal drainage
- post-nasal drip often combined with a sore throat, cough, bad breath, nausea and vomiting
- headache, usually in children six or older
- irritability or fatigue
- swelling around the eyes

into the nasal cavity. The sinuses reduce the weight of the facial bones while maintaining bone strength and shape, and add resonance to the voice.

“Like the nasal cavity, the sinuses are lined with a mucous membrane composed of cells that produce mucus and have tiny hair-like projections called cilia. Incoming dirt particles are trapped by the mucus, and then moved by the cilia into the nasal cavity, where the sinuses drain. Because the drainage can be blocked, the sinuses are particularly vulnerable to infections and inflammation—called sinusitis.

“But sinusitis can be much more than just uncomfortable,” says Dr. Judge. “In unusual worst cases, it can be fatal.

“Sinusitis is an inflammation of the sinuses caused by an allergy or a viral, bacterial, or fungal infection, and it can be either acute, of relatively short duration, or chronic,” he explains. “The symptoms of sinusitis include tenderness and swelling over the affected sinus, but the precise symptoms depend on which sinus is affected. Maxillary sinusitis, for example, produces pain over the cheeks just below the eyes, toothache, and headache. Frontal sinusitis produces headache over the forehead. Ethmoid sinusitis produces pain behind and between the eyes and headache—often severe—over the forehead,” the doctor says. “In people who have poorly controlled diabetes or an impaired immune system, fungi can cause severe and even fatal sinusitis.”

#### CAUSES OF SINUSITIS

“Sinus disease has become an epidemic in this country, and for many reasons,” says Dr. Judge. “In my practice, the problems related to sinus disease that are most common include:

**SMOKING:** “It is extremely difficult, probably impossible, to have healthy sinuses if you smoke cigarettes. Nicotine paralyzes the cilia. It would be difficult to name anything more harmful to the body’s

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air filter system than smoke of any kind. Marijuana and cocaine—whether smoked or inhaled—are also harmful to the nasal mucous membranes.

**AIR POLLUTION:** “One study estimates that air pollution is involved in more than two million deaths each year throughout the world. It is a leading cause of death in this country, as well. Indoor air can be many times more polluted than outdoor air—and most of us spend most of our time indoors.

**ALLERGIES:** “Those with asthma and nasal allergies are very susceptible to sinus infections. Their nasal and sinus mucosa are extremely sensitive and often hyperactive and potentially hypersecretory. When an allergic reaction takes place, there is swelling of the mucosa and obstruction of the sinuses. Food allergies, for example, may be a factor in chronic sinusitis. The foods most often implicated are wheat, cow’s milk and all other dairy products, chocolate, corn, soy, white sugar, brewer’s and baker’s yeast, oranges, tomatoes, bell peppers, white potatoes, eggs, garlic, peanuts, black pepper, red meat, coffee, black tea, beer, wine, and champagne.

**AND MANY OTHER CAUSES,** “ranging from the common cold to dry, moist, and cold air; to occupational hazards, dental problems, immunodeficiency, malformations of the sinuses, and stress.”

#### TREATING THE PROBLEM

“So the question is, how do we treat a problem that is becoming ever more common in our midst? Treatment of acute sinusitis is aimed at improving sinus drainage and curing the infection,” says Dr. Judge. “One effective way to do that is with steam inhalation, which helps blood vessels in the mucous membrane constrict.

“A combination of decongestants, antihistamines, and antibiotics may be used together to treat sinus infections. Decongestants work to ease breathing by shrinking dilated blood vessels to normal size and reducing the amount of fluid released into the lining of the nose. Antihistamines prevent the histamine released from the immune system from causing nose and eye irritation.

“For sinus infection treatment, there are prescription medications available today that are more convenient to take, such as preparations that combine antihistamines with decongestants. Some of these medications are available in non-sedating formulas and only need to be taken once a day. For severe inflammation, corticosteroids may also be used to unblock nasal passages to help sinus cavities drain.

“For both acute and chronic sinusitis, antibiotics such as amoxicillin are given. People who have chronic sinusitis take antibiotics for a longer period. When antibiotics are no longer effective, surgery may be required to improve the sinus drainage system and to remove infected tissue.”

For more information about diagnostic and treatment options for allergies, asthma, and sinus conditions, contact:

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