

Sinus Care

By Suze Hargraves

There is a throbbing in your face right around your eyes. Your upper teeth hurt. Your eyes feel droopy or swollen. You've got sinus problems. WebMD gives us with this basic guideline regarding sinus pain and pressure: "If you have nasal congestion and sinus pressure for more than a week or two, you should see your doctor. " That's pretty straight forward, but what can we do to help alleviate sinus woes in the meantime?

As always an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. The easiest way to take care of your sinuses and prevent problems is by irrigating them. Irrigation means flushing salt water into your nasal passages. I know this doesn't sound pleasant but it's a fairly simple process once you get over the concept. The process of irrigating your sinuses isn't new. It's been around for centuries. The "neti pot" is one of the oldest methods of sinus irrigation. You can get more information on using a neti pot at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nasal_irrigation or talk to a pharmacist. I personally use a product called Sinus Rinse™ Nasal Wash by NeilMed because I find the delivery system easier to use. (<http://www.neilmed.com/usa/products.php>). Both neti pots and the NeilMed product are readily available at local drugstores and major retailers. A friend of mine described the procedure as "gross", but the long term benefits as "amazing". Keep in mind that you will not get the same results from a saline spray. The saline sprays, although they do provide some of the necessary moisture, don't flush the sinus cavities with the same; well let's just say "zeal" as the irrigation technique.

A common mistake people make is thinking that to alleviate sinus pressure it's best to go with nasal sprays containing oxymetazoline hydrochloride. These are the sinus sprays like Sudafed and other non-saline brands. Over the counter nasal sprays have a "backlash" affect. The more you use them, the more you need them. They are simply not meant for long-term use. No, you cannot become addicted to these products. There is nothing addictive in them. You become tolerant to them and require more to get the same results. If you stop using them, your congestion will worsen until the "rebound" effect wears off. OTC nasal sprays are simply not an effective, long term way to treat your stuffy head. If you've been using an over-the-counter nasal spray daily for any length of time talk to your healthcare provider about getting yourself out of the congestion cycle.

Having chronically stuffy sinuses can mean you've got allergies or a more serious sinus condition that needs to be addressed. If a warm compress on your face and irrigation don't provide relief consult your health care provider before you start self-medicating. You could be wasting a lot of money on products that will have little or no effect on your sinus suffering long term. Keep your sinuses moist by drinking water, keep your home at sufficient humidity, avoid smoke, alcohol and of course recreational drugs.

Take care of your sinuses and when you stop and smell the roses, you might actually find out they smell as beautiful as they look.

Suze Hargraves is a staff member and writer for White Mountain Community Health Center, a non-profit health care provider serving the Mount Washington Valley. Call (603) 447-8900, Ext. 1, for an appointment or information.