

HOW TO TREAT NASAL & SINUS DISEASE

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The upper airways are subject to all the environmental stimuli that we see in the lower airways in conditions such as asthma. The lining of the nose and sinuses and the tube to your middle ear (Eustachian tube) are one continuous layer of cells. They can react to allergens such as pollen and house dust mite and to physical stimuli such as cold dry air and to bacteria and viruses. The tissues are subject to the effects of aspirin and NSAIDs and can be infiltrated by eosinophils. Chronic immunological reactions to fungi can also develop.

Sinuses drain via narrow openings which can block off easily and from time to time bacteria can be trapped internally and make you worse. However if sinuses can drain freely then the secretions will frequently drain into the throat and cause coughing.

Upper airway symptoms include:

- a) Sneezing attacks
- b) Itchy/watery eyes
- c) Blocked nose
- d) Painful sinuses (cheeks, forehead, behind the eyes)
- e) Runny nose
- f) Cough
- g) Voice change

Treatments are limited and include

- Antihistamines - treat sneezing attacks and itchy eyes, nose throat
- Nasal steroid sprays - for long term prevention works in most but not all patients
- 'cold and flu' nasal sprays - to dry secretions up – short term relief of blockage & cough
- Atrovent Nasal spray - for watery runny nose
- Cromoglycate nasal spray - unclear when this works
- Antileukotrienes - can help some patients but response unpredictable
- Oral steroids - may be needed if sprays not helping
- Sudafed - if cold & flu sprays do not work, particularly for blockage

Surgery

The role of surgery is to change the anatomy and help the sinuses and nose to function better. However it does not treat the cause and frequently problems recur. It can increase sinus drainage, remove blockages such as polyps and straighten the nose.

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Desensitisation

This approach is improving all the time. The best results are for nasal disease and particularly for grass pollen allergy and for house dust mite. Treatment is now a tablet or spray under the tongue, which has > 50% success.

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