

Sinus Infections, Allergies, and Nasal/Respiratory Irritants

The average adult has three to five respiratory infections per year. These usually begin with sneezing and nasal drainage, with subsequent development of thick mucus, nasal congestion, sore throat, and coughing. These can last 7 to 10 days and are usually viral infections that cause sinus inflammation, which do NOT improve with antibiotic therapy. A bacterial sinus infection is usually defined as persistent symptoms that last about 10 to 14 days.

Exposure to cigarette smoke, environmental irritants, persons prone to infections, chronic allergies, and hereditary factors will make some people more likely to develop infections. If symptoms persist after proper medical treatment, surgery may be necessary to open the obstructed sinuses to allow for ventilation and drainage of the sinuses. Sinus surgery usually does not completely eliminate the occurrence of infections, but it may help reduce the severity and frequency of sinus symptoms. Of course, medical treatment and/or allergy treatment is often needed even after successful surgery.

Many environmental irritants can cause symptoms that worsen or mimic symptoms of allergies. This may include burning or itching of the eyes, nose, throat, lungs, nasal congestion, cough, and/or wheezing. Examples of irritants are tobacco smoke, perfumes, hair spray, household chemicals, and outdoor ozone. Medications and allergy shots are not usually effective for the treatment of symptoms from irritants.

When treating allergies, it is important to reduce exposure to triggers in the environment that may worsen allergy symptoms. Healthy eating and exercise habits may help reduce respiratory and allergy symptoms. Specific guidelines to reduce irritants and allergy triggers are outlined below:

- Patients should make every effort to stop smoking or avoid those who do smoke. When air pollution levels are high, stay indoors as much as possible. Air conditioning filters should be changed monthly. The use of HEPA (high efficiency particle arresting) filters is recommended at home and in the workplace. They are usually available at stores that sell appliances and air conditioners. Although relief is often incomplete, exposure to irritants can be combated with nasal saline (salt water) rinsing used daily.
- Avoid sources of dust such as stuffed animals, feather pillows, and down comforters. Keep closet doors closed. Vacuum mattresses and box springs, and then cover them (and pillows) with dustmite proof covers. Avoid fuzzy-surfaced wool and cotton blankets, chenille bedspreads, and down comforters. Carpet should be vacuumed frequently and professionally cleaned at least annually. Washable window shades are preferable to drapes and Venetian blinds. Try to maintain a relative humidity in the home of about 45 percent.
- Dusting should be done frequently, with the use of a pollen mask if needed. Use a

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damp cloth to clean the room from top to bottom, with attention to walls, molding, shelves, pictures, closets, and furniture. Wet mopping is preferable to sweeping. Water-filter vacuum cleaners are recommended to capture dust, and vacuums with HEPA filters are the most efficient.

- To treat house dust mites in the carpet, consider using ACAROSAN, which is brushed into carpets and vacuumed after several hours. This is available without prescription at pharmacies, hospital supply outlets, and allergy supply stores.
- Pollen levels are increased by wind, heat, and dryness. Since levels are highest in the early morning, plan activities to diminish exposure. Pollen masks may be used to decrease exposure.
- Molds thrive in moist environments where air circulation is poor. Avoid leaving damp clothes in closets and avoid exposure to basements. Check windows, air conditioners, vaporizers, humidifiers, bathroom walls/floors, and tiles for mold. Clean with dilute bleach (1 pint diluted in 1 gallon of water) and remove obviously moldy objects such as old shoes, books, plants, and wet carpet. House plants should be moved outside if possible. Avoid compost piles, leaf piles, and grass clippings. Use mite proof covers on mattresses, box springs, and pillows.
- Pets often worsen allergic symptoms. Try to keep them outside (or at least out of the bedroom). Cat dander can persist for several months even after cats are removed from the house.
- Chemicals may cause problems for some people that are sensitive to them. Avoidance is the key in this situation. Sources of indoor pollution include gas appliances, newsprint, insecticides, plastics, nail polish removers, cements/adhesives, and dyes from clothing/furniture.

Following these environmental guidelines should help in the prevention and treatment of chronic nasal, sinus and allergic disorders.

Please visit our website www.tampabayent.com for more information and links to other reputable medical web sites.