



University of North Carolina Wilmington  
Abrons Student Health Center

## INSTRUCTION SHEET: SINUSITIS

The Student Health Provider has diagnosed sinusitis. Sinusitis is inflammation of the sinuses, often due to infection.

Sinuses are hollow areas in bone, normally filled with air. They are located in the skull, near the nose and eyes. Glands in the lining of the sinuses produce mucus, which drains through small openings into the nose and upper throat.

Inflammation of the sinuses can block the openings, and mucus backs up in the sinuses. Causes of inflammation include allergies, colds, old injuries to the nose, smoking, and polyps (benign growths).

Germ (viruses and bacteria) can multiply in blocked sinuses, leading to sinusitis.

Symptoms of sinusitis include a sense of fullness and pressure around the nose and eyes, facial pain, headache, aching in the upper jaws, fever, and foul tasting/appearing drainage in the nose and throat.

Most of the time, an antibiotic is not recommended to treat sinusitis. Sinusitis is treated with antibiotics only if the infection is severe or if the patient has a weak immune system.

If sinusitis worsens, complications such as infection in the ears and, rarely, infection in the lungs (pneumonia), or brain and spinal cord (meningitis) can result.

### MEASURES YOU SHOULD TAKE TO HELP TREAT YOUR SINUSITIS:

1. Drink plenty of liquids. Fluids keep mucus loose and easier to drain.
2. Your provider may recommend a nasal spray decongestant or an oral (taken by mouth) decongestant to help open blocked sinuses.
3. Use a vaporizer, apply hot compresses (warm washcloths) to your face, or inhale steam from a hot shower to help open and drain sinuses.
4. If an antibiotic is prescribed, take it as directed, until gone. The infection may continue if the antibiotic is stopped too soon.
5. Over-the-counter pain medications can relieve discomfort associated with sinusitis. Acetaminophen (Tylenol), ibuprofen, or naproxen can be taken, depending on individual preference.
6. If you smoke cigarettes, stop now and forever.
7. Should your condition worsen significantly, go to the closest emergency department *at once!* Specifically, seek care if you experience a *severe* headache, stiff and painful neck, swelling of the face around the eye, change in vision, seizure, or mental confusion.
8. If your condition continues without improvement, make a follow-up appointment with your personal/referral doctor or return to the Student Health Center.