



TO YOUR HEALTH

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MORE THAN A SNEEZE

By Barbara Chenoweth, NP

For all of us, spring ushers in warm weather, sunshine and longer days but for many, it also brings the suffering of allergy season. Some have written that chronic sinusitis, the hallmark of allergy season, interferes more with our quality of life than the symptoms of heart disease, lung conditions and back pain, (*Dr. Andrew Weil's Self Healing*, November 2005). Up to 50% of the adult population experiences at least one episode of acute sinusitis per year, and a large number, which has increased in the past decade, try to cope with chronic sinusitis, (*Healthy Years*, UCLA Division of Geriatrics, May 2007).

As *Health Years* goes on to say, "the increase in sinusitis may be due to increased pollution, environmental irritants and antibiotic resistance due to frequent use of broad-spectrum antibiotics." Normal changes that can occur as we age also contribute: changes in the nasal structures can cause airway and breathing obstructions, and the ability to control mucous production declines. The combination of these factors can place older people at higher risk for sinusitis.

What is sinusitis? Anyone who has had it knows that it feels like a cold that goes on for weeks and weeks. Sinusitis is characterized by sneezing, headache, especially when bending forward, stuffy nose, bad breath, loss of taste or smell, sore throat and coughing. It occurs when the air-filled sinuses, the cavities around the nose and nasal passages, become inflamed, and fluid accumulates, interfering with the normal drainage of fluid (www.mayoclinic.com). Sinusitis can be triggered by a viral infec-

tion. If the viral infection lasts more than two weeks, it may have turned into a bacterial infection that requires antibiotic treatment. In addition, other triggers of sinusitis include:

- Allergies
- Deviated nasal septum
- Nasal polyps
- Other physical conditions, ie. GERD (gastroesophageal reflux disease)

By definition, chronic sinusitis lasts longer than eight weeks. It can cause an episode of asthma in people who have asthma. Although less common, it also can trigger serious conditions such as meningitis, vision problems or even blood clots. For this reason, it is important to have a medical evaluation for symptoms of fever, severe pain or stiff neck.

Treatment of sinusitis can include antibiotics, nasal decongestants (only on the advice of a medical practitioner since decongestants have their own side effects and precautions), nasal corticosteroid sprays (ie. Flonase, Rhinocort), antihistamines and saline solutions. When sinusitis is caused by allergies (allergic rhinosinusitis), the treatment is often initiated before the allergy season and may include non-sedating antihistamines and nasal steroid sprays. Since some of these medicines can adversely affect the blood pressure, glaucoma or urinary retention, self-treatment is not recommended.

Chronic sinusitis can be treated with sinus surgery, and a fairly new procedure, balloon sinusplasty, which is less invasive than traditional surgery. A sinus specialist can evaluate chronic sinusitis and determine if surgery would be helpful and if so, what type. Clearly, there are many

treatment options for sufferers of chronic sinusitis. Nonetheless, prevention is the key to coping with sinusitis:

- Control exposure to environmental allergens like dust, smog, mold and pollen
- Keep your house as clean as possible
- Use allergy-proof pillow and mattress covers
- Avoid animals if they trigger your symptoms
- Stay indoors and avoid exercise outdoors during seasons of high pollen counts
- Decrease your risk of colds by hand washing
- Have an annual flu shot
- Use a humidifier but be sure to keep it clean and free of mold
- Keep a healthy immune system by eating well, exercising regularly and minimizing stress
- Avoid alcohol because it can cause the sinus passages to swell
- Self-care practices that are helpful include a warm shower to "steam" the sinuses, warm compresses to the nose, cheeks and eyes, and saline nasal irrigations and/or frequent use of saline nasal spray to rinse out irritants or allergens
- Drink plenty of fluids to keep the sinuses moist

There is help for sinusitis, and it comes in many forms. Don't suffer in silence, seek out medical attention! Be prepared for the coming allergy season!

HEALTH EDUCATION LECTURE

The April Health Education Lecture *To Hear Again: Research into Restoring Hearing Loss in Adults* will be presented by Dr. Joshua Mirtie, a Researcher at Children's Hospital. Please join us Wednesday morning, April 16, 10:30 - 11:30AM in the Auditorium.

IMPROVE YOUR BALANCE

By Muire Lindahl

Fear of falling is a legitimate concern of older adults and with good reason. U.S. hospitals report over 300,000 admissions per year for hip fractures, 90% of them the result of a fall.

The National Institute on Aging emphasizes specific lower body strengthening exercises, pictured below, to improve balance and prevent falls. A detailed handout on these exercises is available in the Fitness Department.

Ankle Flexion



Hip Flexion



Hip Extension



Knee Flexion



Side Leg Raise



Heel to Toe Walk

