

# House Calls

by Rikki Schuster, PA-C

Oh my aching head!

Sinus headaches caused by sinusitis (inflammation of the sinuses) are certainly one of the most annoying types of pain there can be. Similar to a toothache, you can often feel a throbbing, dull ache in your face, cheeks, and forehead. The headache is often worse in the morning or when bending forward. People often have nasal congestion with green-yellow discharge and post nasal drip. Sometimes sinusitis can even cause a fever.

If the inflammation and infection in the sinuses is moderate to severe, the congestion becomes quite thick and can cause complete blockage of the sinus openings, blocking the discharge, and increasing the pain.

The common cold may initiate the infection of the sinuses as well as irritation of the nasal passages from allergies, smoking, swimming, and fatigue. Risks of getting sinusitis increase with illnesses that have lowered resistance, smoking, exposure to cold, damp weather outdoors and dry heat indoors. Exposure to others in public places and swimming in contaminated water can also increase your risks.

Sinus infections are usually curable with intense treatment, and recurrence is common. Possible (very rare) complications of untreated sinusitis are meningitis and infection of the bone.

If you find yourself with the symptoms of a sinus infection, prompt medical treatment is indicated. Typically, medical providers can diagnose sinusitis by physical exam and history of symptoms, however occasionally diagnostic tests such as x-rays may be needed to help with the diagnosis.

Treatment is aimed at improving drainage and control-

ling the infection. Use of a cool mist humidifier to help thin the nasal secretions is helpful to allow the sinuses to drain more readily.

Applying moist heat to the sinuses and nose may help relieve nasal pain and pressure. For infants and young children who aren't able to blow their nose effectively, using a nasal aspirator to suction each nostril gently helps to drain the sinuses. Over the counter saline nose drops without added medication is a helpful tool to keep nasal passages more comfortable.

Treatment may include prescription nasal spray, nose drops, or decongestant medicine to reduce congestion along with an antibiotic to fight the infection. For minor pain, you may want to try over the counter pain medication like acetaminophen. Drinking extra fluids also helps thin the nasal secretions to drain the sinuses as well.

*Rikki Schuster, PA-C is a certified Physician Assistant who has been practicing emergency medicine and urgent care for over eight years. She currently has her own practice, Medical House Calls, treating minor medical conditions in your home, school, or workplace seven days a week. She can be reached by calling 252-475-2007.*