



# PATIENT INFORMATION ON Diagnosis of Acute Sinusitis

## QUESTION

## ANSWER

What are the sinuses?

Sinuses are hollow spaces in the bones around the nose that connect to the nose through small, narrow channels. The sinuses stay healthy when the channels are open, which allows air from the nose to enter the sinuses and mucus made in the sinuses to drain into the nose.

What is sinusitis?

Sinusitis, also called rhinosinusitis, affects about 1 in 8 adults annually and generally occurs when viruses or bacteria infect the sinuses (often during a cold) and begin to multiply. Part of the body's reaction to the infection causes the sinus lining to swell, blocking the channels that drain the sinuses. This causes mucus and pus to fill up the nose and sinus cavities.

How can I tell if I have acute sinusitis?

You have acute sinusitis when there has been up to 4 weeks of cloudy or colored (not clear) drainage from the nose plus one or both of the following: (a) a stuffy, congested, or blocked nose or (b) pain, pressure or fullness in the face, head, or around the eyes.

How can I tell if my sinusitis is caused by viruses or bacteria?

Acute *viral* sinusitis is likely if you have been sick less than 10 days and are not getting worse.  
  
Acute *bacterial* sinusitis is likely when you do not improve at all within 10 days of getting sick or when you get worse within 10 days after beginning to get better.

Why is it important to tell if my sinusitis is caused by bacteria?

Because sinusitis is treated differently based on cause: acute viral sinusitis does *not* benefit from antibiotics, but some patients with acute bacterial sinusitis may get better faster with an antibiotic.

**SOURCE:** Rosenfeld RM, Piccirillo JF, Chandrasekhar, SS, et al. Clinical Practice Guideline: Adult Sinusitis. *Otolaryngol Head Neck Surg.* 2015.



AMERICAN ACADEMY OF  
OTOLARYNGOLOGY-  
HEAD AND NECK SURGERY

FOUNDATION

[www.entnet.org](http://www.entnet.org)

### ABOUT THE AAO-HNS/F

The American Academy of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery ([www.entnet.org](http://www.entnet.org)), one of the oldest medical associations in the nation, represents about 12,000 physicians and allied health professionals who specialize in the diagnosis and treatment of disorders of the ears, nose, throat and related structures of the head and neck. The Academy serves its members by facilitating the advancement of the science and art of medicine related to otolaryngology and by representing the specialty in governmental and socioeconomic issues. The AAO-HNS Foundation works to advance the art, science, and ethical practice of otolaryngology-head and neck surgery through education, research, and lifelong learning. The organization's vision: "Empowering otolaryngology-head and neck surgeons to deliver the best patient care."