



Dear KC-CDC: I have sinus problems. I am getting headaches in the front of my head and I have trouble breathing through my nose. My face also hurts. How can I avoid this condition in the future?

Hard to Breathe

Dear Hard to Breathe: Sinuses are hollow spaces in the skull above the eyebrows, between the eyes, and along the sides of the nose. They're lined with membranes that normally produce watery mucus. Colds, flu, allergies, smoke, or air pollution can make the sinus membranes swell. Then the mucus doesn't drain. When these changes occur, bacteria can invade and a sinus infection results.

Here's how to avoid the risk. If you smoke, stop. Smokers are much more likely to develop sinusitis. Avoid alcohol because alcohol swells sinus membranes. Wash your hands often and keep your hands away from your mouth, nose and eyes to reduce your risk of a cold. Consider getting a flu shot every year. If you get a cold or the flu, take care of yourself right away. Rest as much as you can. But if home treatments give no relief of sinus pain or pressure after 5-7 days, see your health care provider. If your vision gets blurry or changes in some other way or if you have swelling around your eyes, make an appointment.

If inflamed sinuses become infected, antibiotics may be needed to clear up the infection. A health care provider will be able to decide whether you need antibiotics and prescribe them if you do. A sinus infection should be treated promptly and correctly. Untreated infections can lead to changes in sinuses that make sinusitis chronic. An untreated infection can also spread to other sinuses, ears, throat, or eyes.