



About Nose, Sinuses and Ears

We tend to take for granted that breathing through the nose is normal for everyone. However, it is estimated that several million people in the United States do not have the luxury of breathing through their nose on a regular basis. When we breathe through our nose, the air circulates through the sinuses and while passing through the sinuses, the air is humidified, filtered and brought to body temperature. The sinuses also give resonance to our voice.

Anyone with nasal obstruction, either functional or mechanical, has a medical condition known as rhinitis. A major symptom of rhinitis in adults can be sinus headaches. These headaches are usually caused by sinus pressure. If rhinitis persists, it can lead to fluid collection in the sinuses and, ultimately, a sinus infection. Most people who have sinus problems have nasal obstruction. Unless nasal symptoms are cleared, sinus problems will persist.

The most common complication of rhinitis in children is recurrent fluid collection in the ears which can lead to middle-ear infection. In children with recurrent ear infections, hearing loss may be significant and lead to learning problems in childhood.

Patients who have chronic rhinitis typically also have constant post-nasal drip and frequent sore throats. Children may have an upset stomach in the morning because of swallowing mucous and increased gastric acidity.

Nasal obstruction also causes tear-duct obstruction leading to teary eyes. In extreme cases of nasal obstruction, people experience a loss of smell and taste. Chronic mouth breathing may cause orthodontic issues as well.

Cold symptoms which last for more than 10-14 days, often with green or yellow nasal discharge, may be due to a sinus infection, also known as sinusitis. Chronic sinusitis can cause a flare-up of asthma and bronchitis. Keeping the upper airways clear is very important in asthmatics.

There are several causes for nasal blockage. Some of the most common are described as follows:

1. **Allergic Rhinitis** is the most common cause of nasal blockage (more common in children and young adults). Allergies are less common in older people.
2. People with **Non-Allergic Rhinitis with Eosinophils** have similar symptoms as those with allergies, however, their symptoms are present yearlong. These patients respond well when using steroid nasal sprays.
3. People with **Vasomotor (Non-allergic) Rhinitis** have very sensitive nasal linings. Irritants like smoke, dust, perfumes, hair sprays, cold air, temperature changes and barometric pressure changes can aggravate their symptoms. They have chronic nasal congestion and constant post-nasal drip. Most of these patients ultimately end up with chronic sinus problems.
4. **Nasal Polyps** are growths of extra tissue in the nose. Allergies can aggravate nasal polyps. Nasal polyps never become cancerous. This group of patients should be on cortisone nasal sprays to prevent recurrence.
5. **Mechanical Blockage Such As Nasal Septal Deviation, Enlarged Adenoids or Foreign Bodies** are another common cause of nasal blockage.
6. **Rhinitis Medicamentosa** is caused by excessive use of decongestant nasal sprays. This condition is most common in patients with vasomotor rhinitis.
7. **Rhinitis** secondary to the common cold usually lasts about 10-14 days and then gets better.
8. Antihypertensive medications and oral contraceptives sometimes cause nasal stuffiness.

ANYONE WHO HAS CHRONIC RHINITIS SYMPTOMS SHOULD BE EVALUATED TO DETERMINE WHICH OF THE ABOVE CONDITIONS IS CAUSING SYMPTOMS. BY TREATING THE NASAL SYMPTOMS AGGRESSIVELY, CHRONIC SINUS PROBLEMS MAY BE PREVENTED.