Nasal Allergies

In children, viral illness and nasal allergies are the two most common causes of sinusitis (sinuses that are infected or inflamed). Allergies clog nasal passages which can lead to sinusitis. This congestion can block sinus drainage and air movement. Antibiotics alone may not help with nasal allergies since they do not work for chronic congestion.

Patients with sinusitis and allergies usually have some degree of dust and mold sensitivity. These allergies do not always show up on skin testing. Young children may have negative or “normal” skin test results and still have problems with nasal congestion due to dust and mold sensitivity.

Treating nasal allergies

Reduce dust and mold in your home

Dust and molds are the most common allergies in people with chronic sinusitis. Dust allergies are sensitivity to dust mites which are tiny organisms that feed on flakes of skin shed by humans and animals (called dander).

To reduce dust mites and molds in your home:

• Keep pets out of the bedroom, even during the day. Cats and dogs sleeping on the bed will increase dust mites in the mattress and bed linens.
• Use dust reducing (vinyl) mattress and pillow covers for your child’s bed. All linen stores carry these products along with machine washable linens, which help reduce dust mites.
• Avoid down (feather) comforters and pillows.
• Limit your child to one or two favorite stuffed animals and wash them often in hot water.
• Air filters do not get rid of dust mites

Other home cleaning tips:

• Remove old carpet, upholstered furniture or curtains from your child’s bedroom.
• Clean heating and air conditioning ducts every 4 to 5 years.
• Many people are also allergic to pollens. Use electrostatic air filters to help reduce pollen counts. Keep doors and windows closed as much as possible.

Antihistamines

Histamine is a chemical released in the nose in response to allergic reaction. Histamine causes sneezing, itching, and thin watery runny nose. Traditional antihistamines like Benadryl will help sneezing, itching and watery runny nose, but not chronic congestion.

The newer once a day antihistamines such as Claritin and Zyrtec can help with chronic congestion and nighttime cough. They come in an over-the-counter liquid or pills. These are most often taken once a day, at night.

There is no cure for nasal allergies. This handout covers the 4 main types of treatment.
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Antihistamines are better used for short periods of time or when your child is having a flare-up of symptoms. Your child may feel tired and cranky for the first 2-3 days while taking antihistamines. If your child is not getting better within 3 days, then it is likely not helping.

Nasal steroids
Steroids block all the chemicals that are released with an allergic reaction. They can help reduce allergy symptoms including nasal congestion. Nose spray steroids are given in a small amount into the nose. There are no side effects because there is little or no steroid absorbed into the body. Steroid sprays have been used for almost 30 years and have never been shown to cause any side effects when used as directed. They are nonaddictive.

Newer nasal steroids are stronger and may last longer. Flonase (fluticasone) and Nasacort have the most rapid effect and are most often prescribed as a once-a-day spray. Rhinocort (budesonide) is water based and is less irritating.

Nasal steroid sprays are best as preventative medicine. They need to be used every day for at least 2 weeks to “kick in” and reach their greatest benefit. If they are working, use them for 6 to 8 weeks and then stop. Once the medicine has started working it will keep on working for several weeks after stopping use. For children with year round nasal allergy problems, try a pattern of 6 to 8 weeks “on” and 3 to 4 weeks “off.”

Use these medicines only if recommend by your healthcare provider. Check with your healthcare provider first before giving any type of medicine to your child.

Allergy shots
Allergy shots work best for children with certain types of allergies, like to Fall weeds, Spring trees, Summer grasses and certain animal dander. Allergy shots may be used if your child continues to have problems even after trying environmental control, antihistamines and nasal steroid sprays. Allergy shots are different from medicines in that they may result in a partial cure of allergy symptoms. Allergy shots may be considered for children who:

• Are older than 10 years
• Nasal sprays are not helping and they have health issues such as difficult to control asthma
• Skin test results indicate that shots would probably help

Nasal allergies and chronic sinusitis
Using preventative anti-allergy treatments when your child is well and treating sinusitis flare ups with antibiotics will help them feel better and reduce the number of times they have sinusitis.