

## **Knowing the Difference between Allergies, Bacterial and Viral Infections**

There are three sinus conditions that have similar symptoms but are caused by different pathogens: allergies, respiratory viruses (such as those that cause colds), and bacterial sinusitis. As symptoms of these conditions are so similar, they are often difficult to diagnose. Listed below are characteristics of each:

### **Allergies**

#### Symptoms

- Sneezing, stuffy, runny and/or itchy nose
- Clear or whitish nasal drip & a tickle in throat
- Itchy, watery, or burning eyes
- Mild pressure or pain in upper teeth, cheeks, top of nose, between eyes, or in forehead



#### What to Do

- Avoid exposure to allergens and control environment when possible
- Drink plenty of fluids
- Avoid smoking, caffeine and alcohol
- If recommended by a doctor, take a non-sedating antihistamine or decongestant to reduce nasal congestion and swelling; use steroid eyedrops to relieve itchy, watery eyes; and use a steroid nasal spray or an additional anti-inflammatory medication to prevent allergy symptoms

### **Viral Infections**

#### Symptoms

- High-grade fever (101.5 F or higher) at times
- Generalized body aches and fatigue
- Coughing
- Drainage from nose thickens
- Nasal discharge is clear to yellowish
- Feel need to see physician within two-days of symptom onset



### What to Do

- Wash hands frequently and properly
- Drink plenty of fluids
- Avoid smoking, caffeine and alcohol
- Use humidifiers to control room moisture
- If recommended by a doctor, take an over-the-counter pain reliever, take a decongestant to help relieve pressure and congestion, and/or use over-the-counter decongestant nasal spray for a short period of time
- **DO NOT** ask doctor for an antibiotic, as it will not be effective against a viral infection. Overuse and misuse of antibiotics can cause bacteria to become resistant to currently available antibiotics

### Bacterial Infections

#### Symptoms

- Low-grade fever (101.5 F or lower)
- Moderate to severe pressure or pain in upper teeth, cheeks, top of nose, between eyes, or in forehead
- Stuffy nose with thick, yellow to brown or bloody mucus



#### What to Do

- Follow tips for viral infections AND...
- If your doctor prescribes an antibiotic, take all the medication as instructed even if you feel much better within a few days of starting your prescription. If you do not take all medication, the infection may return and some bacteria may develop resistance to the antibiotic you were given

*Please discuss your symptoms and appropriate treatment options with your doctor. The above tips have been developed based on leading independent resources. This information cannot substitute for your doctor's care.*

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