

Sinusitis (acute): antimicrobial prescribing

Information for the public

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Sinusitis: do I need antibiotics?

Sinusitis is a common infection after a cold or flu and is usually caused by a virus. Symptoms include pain around the eyes or cheeks, a blocked nose, headaches and a temperature. People usually get better within 2 to 3 weeks without antibiotics.

Using antibiotics when they are not needed means they may not work as well in the future. This is a serious health risk so NICE has written advice about when to offer antibiotics for some common conditions.

Most people with sinusitis won't be offered antibiotics because:

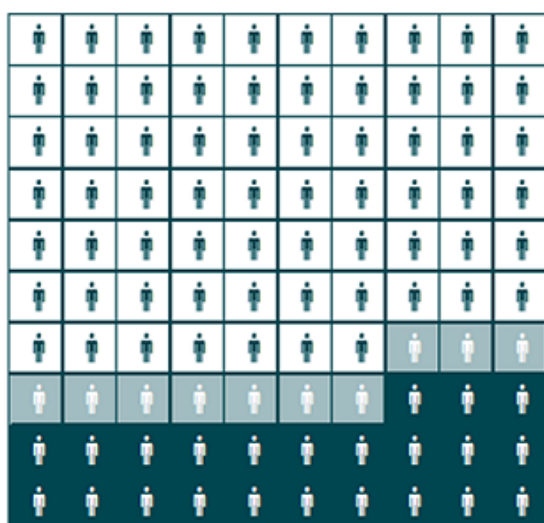
- Your sinusitis will normally get better within 2 to 3 weeks whether you take antibiotics or not.
- Only about 10 out of every 100 people with sinusitis benefit from an antibiotic and the benefit is small.
- The chances of an antibiotic helping your symptoms are about the same as your chances of getting side effects like nausea and diarrhoea.

Talk to your local pharmacist about other ways to help with symptoms, such as taking painkillers. You may like to try nasal decongestants or cleaning the inside of your nose with saline solution, although not enough research has been done to prove that these treatments work.

You will be prescribed antibiotics if you need them, such as if you are very unwell or are at risk of complications. In some cases the prescriber may talk to you about a [back-up antibiotic prescription](#). You can use this to get an antibiotic if you don't start to feel better after a few more days, or start to feel worse.

The diagrams below show information from a study that looked at what happened to people who took antibiotics for sinusitis and what happened to people who didn't.

How likely am I to benefit from antibiotics?



In every 100 adults with sinusitis who take an antibiotic, after 7 to 11 days, **on average**:

- 67 people will be cured or their symptoms will be improved, but this would also happen if they don't take an antibiotic.
- 10 people will be cured or their symptoms will be improved because they take an antibiotic.
- 23 people will not have an improvement in their symptoms even though they take an antibiotic.

It is not possible to say what will happen to any individual person

The information used for the diagrams is taken from a study by [Falagas et al. 2008](#)

How likely am I to get side effects from antibiotics?



In every 100 adults with sinusitis who take an antibiotic, **on average**:

- 70 people will not have other symptoms.
- 8 people will have other symptoms (mainly diarrhoea and nausea) because they take an antibiotic.
- 22 people will have other symptoms (mainly diarrhoea and nausea), but would do if they don't take an antibiotic.

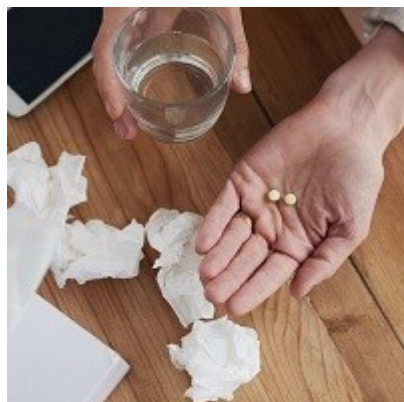
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In the news

Read NICE news about how this guideline will help.

Antibiotics should not be used to treat the majority of sinus infections, NICE says



NICE is advising healthcare professionals to tell their patients that a sinus infection will likely clear-up without antibiotics and that there is little evidence oral decongestants will help to relieve their symptoms.

[See what NICE says](#)

Where can I find out more?

Decisions about treatment and care are best when they are made together. Your health professionals should give you clear information, talk with you about your options and listen carefully to your views and concerns.

[NHS Choices](#) has more information about:

- [sinusitis](#) and
- [antibiotics](#).

We have also written information on [why antibiotics should be used wisely](#).

We wrote this guideline with health professionals and members of the public. All the recommendations are based on the best research available.

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