



Chronic Sinusitis

It is first important to determine if chronic sinusitis is really the problem. Some people may have nasal obstruction or nasal allergy symptoms without sinus problems. Some people have facial pain and frontal headaches without sinus problems. The history and physical exam will many times determine if chronic sinusitis is a problem. A CT scan of the sinuses may be needed to provide a correct diagnosis. Chronic sinusitis implies some amount of chronic paranasal sinus inflammation, infection, and or obstruction. This causes chronic symptoms and recurrent infections. The most common symptoms are nasal obstruction/congestion, thick or colored nasal mucous, facial pressure, hyponasal voice, and decreased sense of smell. Some patients with chronic sinusitis form nasal polyps. Maximal medical therapy may include a 3 to 6 week course of antibiotics, nasal saline irrigation, a topical nasal steroid spray, prednisone, and additional treatment for nasal allergies if appropriate. Acute allergy symptoms include frequent sneezing, nasal congestion, clear runny nose, and itchy/watery eyes. Over the counter antihistamines, prescription antihistamine nasal spray, and Singulair may be added to the above medical treatment for chronic sinusitis. If acute nasal allergy symptoms are significant despite medications, patients may undergo allergy skin testing. A blood test called RAST is also available. These tests will help determine if allergy immunotherapy (allergy shots) is appropriate. Chronic sinusitis does not always resolve with maximal medical therapy. In this situation, endoscopic sinus surgery may be offered. The results of the CT scan will determine the extent of sinus surgery recommended. Sinus surgery is primarily to relieve obstruction and allow better access for nasal saline sinus irrigation. It is important to understand that sinus surgery is one part of managing long term sinus problems. In some patients, the surgery resolves the problem long term. For others, life long continued medical management and nasal saline sinus irrigations are necessary. Patients with a chronic infection for years and those that form nasal polyps are much more difficult to resolve long term. Additional surgery may be recommended depending on the extent of prior surgery and severity of ongoing disease.