

Treating Sinusitis with Naturopathic Medicine

By Dr. Deidre Macdonald, naturopathic physician

In my practice, I have many patients who come for help with chronic sinus congestion. It can be a frustrating and painful condition that can last a lifetime if not treated with the long term in mind. The medicines conventionally used may be okay in the short run, but they have significant issues with long term use. For instance, nasal steroids thin the lining of the nasal mucous, making it more susceptible to bleeding and infection. Fungal infections in the nasal passages are present in 52% of people with chronic sinusitis and are can be caused by long term use of steroid sprays. Antibiotic use creates increased fungal infections throughout the body, including the sinuses and the digestive system.

In treating sinusitis, the goal of naturopathic physicians is to relieve the symptoms using natural medicines (which often have side benefits instead of side effects). In addition to symptom treatment, naturopathic physicians also endeavor to determine the underlying causative factors that are driving this chronic congestion and inflammation. Most patients with sinusitis are aware that they have allergies to inhalants like pollen and dust. However, there may be other factors in one's health that contribute to the conditions. For instance, in my experience, many of my patients with chronic sinusitis also have bowel problems. There is a link between these two conditions, in that both can be caused by food allergies.

I saw a patient, Rose, who presented with a 15 year history of nasal congestion, reoccurring sinus infections and she also had been diagnoses with "Irritable Bowel Syndrome". I suggested that we start our treatment by addressing the bowel. We tested her for food allergies through our non-invasive and effective technique called Vega testing. I coached her on how to make dietary changes and how to heal the lining of her intestines. Within a few months, she was delighted to report that not only were her bowels much improved, she was breathing freely for the first time in years. She said, "I realize that after all these years, my chronic sinus inflammation was my body's way of reacting to wheat". Of course not all cases are so one dimensional, but a thorough investigation health issues is essential to uncovering the clues that will lead to long term success in treating this condition.

Another often overlooked factor for people with chronic sinus conditions is that unresolved dental issues can result in disease spreading to the sinuses. Patients may not realize that an old dental extraction may be harboring an infection under the healed gum tissue. I have also seen a disturbing number of men with chronic sinus infections and allergies that started shortly after working around excessive amounts of sawdust. The sawdust likely assaults the nasal mucosa, allowing antigens to permeate through it and trigger the immune system to create allergic symptoms. Getting to the bottom of the problem, instead of being satisfied with short-term quick fixes is essential for the patient who wants to improve this condition, once and for all.

There are many layers in the naturopathic treatment of chronic upper respiratory problems. First, we must find ways to help with the immediate symptoms while we are

investigating the deeper disturbances in the immune system that are *causing* the problem. Naturopathic treatments for sinus infections are aggressive and varied. We must focus on reducing the inflammation and congestion that impair circulation and set the stage for bacterial infection. There are effective ways to reduce congestion using herbs, hydrotherapy and nutritional supplements. We also want to address the inflammation of the sinus and nasal passages and bromelain gives good results. Natural anti-histamines, like nettles and quercetin are nutritious as well as effective alternatives to drugs. Addressing the fungal and bacterial infections often chronically harboured in the upper respiratory passages is essential. Infections are best treated without drugs that damage other organs, but rather natural medicines like oil of oregano, goldenseal or tea tree oil that are gentle and effective.

The real strength of naturopathic medicine is that it addresses the underlying causes of health problems and treats symptoms as the body's intelligent response to a stress. For sinus problems, the search for underlying factors often leads us to look at food allergies, candida yeast overgrowth in the digestive and respiratory systems, and dental issues. In my clinic, we offer Allergy Desensitization using homeopathic medicines in a fast and effective procedure. Please call for a handout on this topic. Naturopathic doctors also coach their patients on how to build their immune systems through optimal nutrition, herbal, nutritional and homeopathic medicines. The body wants to heal so sometimes we just need to listen to its clues and give it tools to help it succeed.

For more information, or to book a visit to start your personalized program, please contact Dr. Macdonald's office at 897-0235. Dr. Deidre Macdonald is a naturopathic physician with a naturopathic family medical practice in downtown Courtenay. www.getwellhere.com