By Dr. Ramona Warren

Over 37 million Americans suffer with sinusitis each year, making it one of the 10 most common diagnoses in outpatient clinics. Anyone who has ever suffered with sinusitis has felt the painful misery of this condition.

Sinuses are air-filled cavities located within the cheekbones, behind the forehead and eyebrows, on either side of the bridge of the nose and behind the nose directly in front of the brain. They are lined with cells that produce mucus in order to keep the nose from drying out. Sinusitis occurs when the mucus lining becomes inflamed, blocking the flow of air and the flow of mucus in the sinus cavities. Mucus and air become trapped in the sinus cavities, which leads to pressure and pain. The longer mucus is trapped, the greater the risk for sinus infection.

Pain is one of the most common symptoms of sinusitis. Pain and/or pressure in the facial area where the sinus cavities are located, pain in your forehead, upper jaws and teeth are typical. Inflammation of the sinuses can cause severe headaches with the pain focused in the forehead and/or between the eyes. A sinus headache may also include a fever due to infection in the sinus cavity. An easy way to know if you have a true sinus headache is to quickly move your head up and down or side to side. Headache pain that increases with these quick movements is typically due to sinus pressure.

Congestion in the sinuses will drain into the throat causing an irritation that can develop into an annoying cough. The drainage of the sinuses can also cause post-nasal drip leading to a sore throat. Typically symptoms are worse during the night and in the morning due to the sinuses filling up during the night. White, yellow, green or gray mucus is a sign of an infection. Gray mucus indicates a more chronic infection.

A chronic sinus condition could indicate a food sensitivity. Avoiding certain foods can be helpful in getting to the source of your sinus problems. The top three common foods that can lead to inflammation are dairy, gluten and sugar. Completely eliminating these three items from your diet for 30 days will often help reduce, and even resolve, sinus symptoms.

Mold and mildew can also be a common cause of sinusitis. A 1999 study by the Mayo Clinic found 93% of chronic sinusitis was caused by mold. Other studies support these findings. If you suspect this may be the cause of your sinusitis, buy a home mold test kit or have a company that specializes in mold and mildew assess your house.

Below are other some natural solutions to help alleviate sinus pain.

1. Water- Drinking more water helps wash the mucus out of your sinuses more quickly when you have an infection.
2. Herbs and supplements - Andrographis, Echinacea, Garlic, Vitamin C and Oil of Oregano all have antibacterial and antiviral properties and also improve immune function.
3. Apple Cider Vinegar (ACV) – Loaded with antibacterial and antifungal properties, ACV kills the bacteria that cause sinus infections. Mix 1 tablespoon of ACV in water and drink three times a day. Another option is to steam ACV by mixing 1/2 cup of ACV with 1/2 cup of water. Heat it in a pot on the stove and inhale the steam through your nose with your eyes and mouth closed. Make sure to use organic ACV such as Bragg’s.
4. Nasal Sprays - Loosening mucus build up will help relieve sinus pain. While many people reach for medicated nasal sprays, these sprays can become addictive and lead to rebound congestion. Saline sprays can be better option. You can purchase a saline solution at the store, or make your own by taking one cup of water and adding 1 teaspoon of sea salt and one teaspoon of baking soda. Mix these ingredients together and put in a nose spray bottle. Xylitol nasal spray and grapefruit seed extract spray are also helpful in dissolving thick nasal mucus. (If you take medications, be cautious with the grapefruit seed extract due to possible drug interactions.)
5. Nasal irrigation - Neti pots, which look like little tea pots, are a common choice. Fill the pot with a saline solution and position yourself over the sink. Tilt your head and pour the solution into one nostril. The liquid will go into your sinuses and come out the other nostril. Another nasal irrigation option that helps rinse the mucus from your nasal passages and sinuses is the use of a colloidal silver solution. Rather than just allowing the solution to pass through the nasal and sinus cavities and out the other nostril, position yourself on your back in order to maintain the solution in the sinuses for a few minutes before allowing it to drain.
6. Essential oils - Eucalyptus oil, rosemary oil and peppermint oil are good for clearing the sinuses. Inhaling them helps the respiratory tract and thins the mucus. You can inhale them by diffusing into the air, rubbing them on your hands, putting them on a cotton swab or inhaling directly from the bottle.
7. Turmeric - Turmeric is a spice that contains curcumin, which is known to reduce inflammation. You can sprinkle turmeric on your food or you can make a tea. One simple recipe is to mix 2-3 teaspoons of turmeric with 1/4 cup of honey and make a paste. Take a big spoonful of this paste, put it into a cup and add hot water. Squeeze some lemon and add black pepper to taste.