

Breathe Easier
New Technologies Ease Sinusitis & Allergy Symptoms
By Mary Hart

(Originally published by Eagle-Tribune)

Dealing with itchy, watery eyes; a scratchy throat; sneezing non-stop and coughing from post-nasal drip? Allergies are a daily annoyance for some people, and can be especially bothersome for young children and toddlers as they're not sure what's going on and why they're not feeling well. But, did you know that a runny nose and post-nasal drip could be sinusitis instead of allergies? Find out how to treat your allergies and how to know if what you have is sinusitis.

"It is estimated that 20% of adults and children suffer from seasonal or year-round allergies at some point in their life," says Daryl Colden, MD, FACS of Colden ENT, Sinus & Allergy Center in North Andover. "Common allergens include dust, dog and cat dander, trees, mold, ragweed, and grasses. Symptoms can include nasal congestion, discharge, sneezing, itchy eyes, headaches, post nasal drip, scratchy throat and itchy ears." Allergies commonly start in the childhood years, but you can also develop them in adulthood. If you find that your allergies are disrupting your everyday life or sleep, you can treat them with antihistamines like Claritin; decongestants and nasal steroid sprays.

You could also look into allergy shots (immunotherapy), "which have been an effective treatment for many inhaled allergens, such as pollens, dust, molds and animal dander," says Colden. "Before immunotherapy is begun, allergy tests are done in order to determine the offending allergens."

Some people will find that allergies bring on allergy-induced asthma, which can manifest itself in "tight" coughing (instead of a junky cough) or wheezing. If this is the case, your doctor can work with you to find a preventative for the asthma and you will most likely utilize an inhaler for times when the coughing or wheezing occurs.

Environmental allergies have also been linked to sinusitis in recent studies. "Experts estimate about 37 Million people are affected with sinusitis each year, making it one of the most common health conditions in America," says Colden. "Many allergies and colds that persist for weeks or months may actually represent chronic sinusitis. Common symptoms include facial pressure, nasal blockage and congestion, nasal discharge, post nasal drip, headache, bad breathe, swelling around the eye, and decreased smell and taste. Most cases of sinusitis can be treated medically, with antibiotics, steroid sprays, decongestants, and antihistamines if allergies co-exist. Chronic forms of sinusitis often persist for longer periods of time and may be more resistant to medications."

There are new treatments available to help with prolonged sinusitis. "Endoscopic sinus surgery can be performed to help identify and remove areas of swelling and blockage in the sinuses," says Colden. "This technique avoids the use of incisions and allows for a quick recovery with high success rates compared to older surgical techniques. Many physicians now utilize image-guided computerized surgical navigation to help make surgery even safer and more effective. Similar to GPS technology used for automobiles, the area of blockage can be identified precisely with a surgical probe correlated to a computerized CAT scan which is available during the operation. The latest advanced sinus treatment is Balloon Sinuplasty. The technology uses a small, flexible,

Sinus Balloon Catheter to open up blocked sinus passageways, restoring normal sinus drainage and function. When the sinus balloon is inflated, it gently widens the walls of the passageway while maintaining the integrity of the sinus lining.”

If sinusitis or allergies are bothering you, visit your doctor for a referral to an ENT (ear, nose and throat doctor) who can help you. For more information, contact Dr. Colden at 978-685-2900.