

Chronic Rhinosinusitis

Symptoms, causes, and treatments

This handout explains chronic rhinosinusitis, its symptoms, what causes it, and how it is treated.



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What is chronic rhinosinusitis?

Rhinosinusitis is inflammation within the nose and sinus cavities. In *chronic rhinosinusitis* (CRS), the sinuses are inflamed and swollen for 3 months or longer.

Recurrent acute sinusitis is inflammation that goes away when you take medicines, but returns after you have not had symptoms for a while.

If you have CRS, you may have:

- Pain or pressure in your face, often around your eyes, cheeks, nose, or forehead
- Yellow or greenish drainage from your nose
- Stuffy nose or problems breathing through your nose
- Changes in your sense of smell or taste
- Tooth or gum pain
- A feeling of fullness or discomfort in your ears



Chronic rhinosinusitis can cause pain and pressure in your face.

What causes CRS?

We do not know for sure what causes CRS. It usually begins between the ages of 20 to 40, but it can occur at any time.

One cause of CRS may be an overactive immune system. For some people, this may be related to *allergens* (substances that cause an allergic reaction). Tree, grass, and weed pollens are common allergens.

Other things that can “trigger” sinus inflammation include:

- Tobacco smoke
- Viruses, bacteria, or fungal spores
- Chemicals and pollution

If you are predisposed to sinus problems and are exposed to a trigger, a cycle of inflammation begins. It starts with nasal congestion, drainage, and swelling. This may lead to a bacterial infection, which makes the inflammation and swelling worse.

How is CRS diagnosed?

- **Nasal endoscopy:** Your provider may check your nose and sinus by doing a *nasal endoscopy*. During this simple procedure, an endoscope will be placed in your nostril. An endoscope is a thin, flexible tube with a tiny camera and a light on the end. A nasal endoscopy may cause some discomfort, but it should not be painful.
- **CT scan:** Your provider may ask you to have a *computed tomography* (CT) scan. This scan shows areas of your sinuses that we cannot see by looking into your nose.

How is CRS treated?

There is no known cure for CRS, but there are some ways to treat the symptoms.

Medicines and Treatments

To lessen swelling and inflammation, your provider may prescribe:

- *Antibiotic* medicines, for bacterial infections
- *Steroid* medicines, taken by mouth or sprayed into your nose
- Medicines to thin mucus
- Flushing your nose with salt water (*saline*)
- *Antihistamines* or *immunotherapy* shots or drops, for allergies

Surgery

Your provider may advise surgery if your CRS does not go away or get better after trying other treatments. CT scans may be used to help guide the surgery, if needed.

For Best Results

- Learn about your condition. If you have questions about CRS or your care plan, ask your provider.
- Always follow your provider's instructions. You will get the best results if you closely follow your care plan.

To Learn More About Chronic Rhinosinusitis

Visit the ENT Health website by the American Academy of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery:

www.enthealth.org/conditions/sinusitis/

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

Otolaryngology/Head and Neck Surgery Center:
206.598.4022

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