

BOTTOM LINE
Natural Healing
With Dr. Mark Stengler

DEEPER CURES FROM AMERICA'S TOP NATURAL PHYSICIAN

Bottom Line Publications

281 Tresser Boulevard
Stamford, CT. 06901-3226
203-973-5900

www.BottomLineSecrets.com

Chronic Sinusitis A Natural Cure

AN ESTIMATED 37 MILLION AMERICANS SUFFER FROM SINUSITIS EACH YEAR, and nearly 32 million cases of chronic sinusitis are reported annually. If you're one of these people, you know what it feels like to suffer repeated bouts of sinus swelling and infections, tenderness in the face, aching behind the eyes and difficulty breathing through the nose. Most sinus sufferers I see have taken antibiotics and a host of allergy medications for years, and they finally have grown tired of these temporary fixes. I help these people by treating the underlying causes of chronic sinusitis with natural, nontoxic therapies.

A MISSING LINK

One important root cause of sinusitis that is rarely addressed by conventional physicians is fungus. The dark, moist sinus cavities are a great environment for fungal growth. An overgrowth or infection of fungal microbes is most likely to occur after repeated use of antibiotics and steroidal nasal sprays, which suppress the localized immune response.

Researchers at the Mayo Clinic announced to the medical community back in 1999 that fungus was a primary cause of sinusitis. Their first study involved 210 patients with chronic sinusitis. Using new, more accurate methods of testing, which included evaluating

immune and allergy reactions to fungus with a special type of nasal swab, the researchers discovered fungus in the nasal mucus of 96% of the patients. They also identified 40 different kinds of fungus in these people, with an average of 2.7 kinds per person. According to David Sherris, MD, one of the primary researchers, "Our studies indicate that, in fact, fungus is likely the cause of nearly all of these problems. And it is not an allergic reaction, but an immune reaction." In another Mayo Clinic study, all 54 participants who had a history of chronic sinusitis tested positive for fungus.

When the sinus cavities are overrun with fungi, the body responds by marshaling immune cells, such as T-lymphocytes and eosinophils, for an attack. This results in irritation and inflammation of the sinus membranes.

HOW TREATMENT GOES AWRY

Despite all the information from the prestigious Mayo Clinic (which also was given a \$2.5 million National Institutes of Health grant to further investigate the mechanisms behind this immunologic response to the fungi), many doctors—including ear, nose and throat (ENT) specialists—still don't address fungal overgrowth and fungal sensitivity in patients suffering from chronic sinusitis. In fact, many doctors continue to prescribe therapies, such as steroidal nasal sprays, that ac-

tually *promote* fungal overgrowth.

Almost every patient with chronic sinusitis who has come to my office had been prescribed a steroidal nasal spray. One of the most widely used is *fluticasone* (Flonase), which contains a synthetic corticosteroid that reduces inflammation in the nasal passageways and sinuses. Similar steroidal sprays include *triamcinolone* (Nasacort) and *mometasone* (Nasonex). Ironically, the package insert for Flonase lists one of its potential side effects as overgrowth of the fungus *Candida albicans* in the sinus and throat!

Here's an interesting case from my practice. Pat, a 49-year-old woman with a chronic sinus problem, had been given more than 25 courses of antibiotics over the past 10 years. She also had used various allergy and sinus medications, including Flonase and the steroid *prednisone*, which also is known to set the stage for fungal overgrowth. When Pat came to my office, I recommended an antifungal treatment program consisting of a grapefruit seed extract nasal spray, an herbal product containing a strong dose of oregano oil and a probiotic containing *acidophilus* and *bifidobacterium*. I also suggested natural anti-inflammatories for her sinuses, including the flavonoid *quercetin* and a protease enzyme. (I'll describe the mechanism for each therapy below.) Within four weeks, Pat's symptoms dramatically improved, and she has been antibiotic-free ever since.

OTHER CULPRITS

If you suffer from sinusitis, it's important to make sure that there's no structural defect in the nasal passage-

Bottom Line Personal ■ Bottom Line/Health ■ Bottom Line/Retirement ■ Tax Hotline
■ Bottom Line/Natural Healing ■ Bottom Line/Books ■ Bottom Line Secrets ■ Daily Health News

ways or sinuses that hinders drainage. An ENT doctor can order a CT scan of the sinus and perhaps an X-ray or MRI of the sinus cavity. A structural defect that prevents drainage may require surgery—although I suggest that the patient see more than one ENT specialist to confirm that there is a structural blockage.

Undetected dental infections, including low-grade infections in root canals, also can cause chronic sinusitis. Antibiotics don't always kill such infections, since root canals have poor blood supply and bacteria can become trapped there.

In future issues, I'll write more about the link between this type of dental condition and sinusitis. In the meantime, I strongly urge my readers to avoid the long-term use (two weeks or longer) of steroidal nasal sprays. Instead, focus on cleansing the sinus cavities with the following natural antifungal, antiallergy and anti-inflammatory therapies.

NATURAL TREATMENT REGIMEN

Diet. Consume a diet that is bountiful in vegetables, fruits, nuts, seeds, fresh fish and lean poultry. If you can tolerate them, I also highly recommend adding onions, oregano and garlic liberally to your meals. They all have potent antifungal effects. Flaxseed also has antifungal properties. Mix one to two tablespoons of freshly ground flaxseed daily in your cereal, salad or yogurt. It adds a delicious nutty flavor. Just be sure to drink 10 ounces of water within 30 minutes of eating flaxseed. Otherwise, you can get a blockage in your intestine.

Avoid simple sugar products, such as alcohol, soda, white bread and refined pasta, and have no more than eight ounces a day of any unsweetened fruit juice—they suppress immunity, worsen inflammation and promote the growth of fungus. Finally, be wary of cow's milk and wheat, which often

exacerbate sinusitis.

Most people who have chronic sinusitis need to use a combination of natural remedies. For mild cases, try oregano and quercetin. For severe chronic cases or for cases in which oregano and quercetin don't work sufficiently, try all the treatments recommended. Children can follow the dietary suggestions made here, but supplement use should be supervised by a doctor.

Oregano oil. This herbal remedy has been shown to be the most potent available for fungal infections. It is consumed orally, not put into the nose. I recommend taking it by itself in liquid or capsule form or in a combination herbal formula. North American Herb & Spice (800-444-4584, www.oregano-oil.net) has an excellent oregano extract that has been studied by Georgetown University and found to have potent antifungal effects. The liquid version of this combination extract is so potent that you should start by placing two drops under the tongue twice daily and build up to four drops daily over the course of a week. If the taste is too strong, dilute in two to four ounces of water. The recommended dose for the oregano capsule is two to four 250-mg capsules daily. If you are prone to heartburn or ulcers, use oregano with caution—the essential oils can irritate some people's digestive tracts.

Quercetin. This nutrient, which has a natural anti-inflammatory and antihistamine effect, belongs to a family of plant chemicals called flavonoids. It is in onions, apples, green and black tea, vegetables and beans. Because allergies are so common with sinusitis, I recommend that my patients take 500 mg of quercetin (in capsule form) twice daily for its anti-inflammatory effects and to reduce allergy symptoms. Quercetin supplements are available at health-food stores and pharmacies.

Grapefruit seed extract. This anti-fungal/antimicrobial is available in a nasal spray. *To use:* Tilt your head back and pump once into each nostril. For chronic bacterial and/or fungal infections, use once daily...for acute infections, four times daily. I often recommend NutriBiotic Nasal Spray (800-225-4345, www.nutribiotic.com, \$8.25/ounce).

Probiotics. "Good" bacteria is a key component in your immune system's ability to keep fungi and other microbes in check. It's important to replenish these bacteria in your sinuses and digestive tract as well as in the rest of your body—it is especially important if you recently used antibiotics, steroidal nasal sprays or the steroid *prednisone*. Take one pill daily of a probiotic formula containing 3 billion to 5 billion organisms. Good brands include Jarrow (800-726-0886, www.jarrow.com) and Bio-K+ (800-593-2465, www.biokplus.com)—both available at health-food stores.

N-acetylcysteine. This amino acid-derived nutrient thins mucus and promotes sinus drainage. I recommend 500 mg twice daily for those with acute or chronic sinusitis.

Bromelain. This enzyme, which has a natural anti-inflammatory effect, has been shown to improve acute sinusitis. Protease (protein-digesting) enzyme products also confer this benefit. When treating sinusitis, the key is to take bromelain or protease enzymes between meals to benefit from their anti-inflammatory effect. If you choose a protease enzyme, Wobenzyme, available from iHerb.com (888-792-0028, www.iherb.com) is a good formula. The dosage is two tablets twice daily between meals. If you choose bromelain, the less expensive option, take 500 mg two times daily between meals. *Important:* Even though bromelain is made from pineapples, eating pineapple alone does not provide the same benefit. That's

because bromelain is taken from the pineapple stem. Bromelain and protease enzymes are available at health-food stores. *Caution:* Neither protease enzymes nor bromelain should be used if you take a blood thinner, such as *warfarin* (Coumadin), unless supervised by a doctor.

Saline rinses. Saline rinses relieve sinus irritation caused by pollutants, allergens and infections of the nasal passages. Look for a rinse that contains *xylitol*, a natural substance that prevents bacteria from adhering to the nasal cavity. Squirt it in each nostril once or twice a day. Xlear (pronounced “clear”) Nasal Wash (877-599-5327, www.xlear.com) is a good brand. ■

References

J.U. Ponikau, D.A. Sherris, *Mayo Clinic Proceedings*, September 1999.

M.J. Taylor, J.U. Ponikau, D.A. Sherris et al., *Otolaryngologic Head and Neck Surgery*, November 2002.