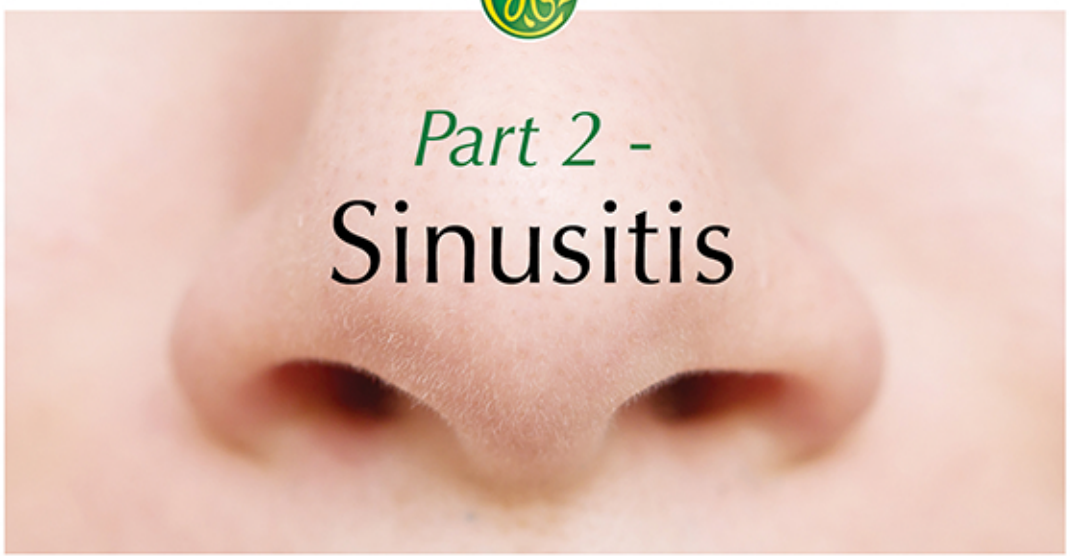
The Respiratory System

with The Herbal Clinic



Part 2 - Sinusitis

Within the skull and facial bones is a network of hollow cavities lined with mucosal tissue, much like inside the nose; these are the sinuses. The largest of these are in the cheekbones and measure about 1 inch across. The others lie in the forehead, between the eyes and in the bones behind the nose.

During a respiratory infection the membranes of the sinuses can become inflamed. This inflammation blocks the narrow passageways which usually allow for drainage of mucus, causing pain and pressure in the cheeks, forehead and around the eyes.

In chronic sinusitis the inflammation persists, unrelated to infection, resulting in long term difficulties in breathing and significantly affecting quality of life. As most cases involve the inflammation of the nasal airway, it has become known as 'chronic rhinosinusitis'. This frustrating condition affects 10% of the UK adult population.

A Nasal Microbiome?

Recent research has found that, like the gut, the sinuses have their own mucosal 'microbiota' with the presence of protective species of bacteria defending against those that are more harmful. Patients with chronic rhinitis were found to have a significantly reduced diversity of bacterial species compared with healthy controls. Treatment that restores the microbial diversity of the sinuses should be a priority. Unfortunately the current protocol of antibiotics and nasal steroids do exactly the opposite. A 2006 review of 49 scientific trials reported 'insignificant effectiveness from the use of any antibiotic' in the treatment of sinusitis1.



The development of nasal probiotics is in its early stages. Though this may offer some relief, it will not address the reason why the bacteria are out of balance. In our experience this is the critical first step. Remove the obstacle that is causing the bacteria to be less diverse and the body itself will restore balance.

Causes of sinusitis may be physical in nature such as a weakened immune system, an allergy/sensitivity to foods or airborne particles (including fungus); even habitual mouth breathing alone can contribute to blocked nostrils. Psychological components include overthinking, anxiety and suppressed grief. Environmental contributors such as chemical air pollutants and cigarette smoke can also play a role. There is often a combination of factors at work.

Herbal treatment to heal the gut and encourage elimination of wastes is usually necessary for lasting results. Overproduction of mucus is the body's attempt to throw out accumulated waste products. Assisting this process of elimination with herbs that encourage regular bowel motions and excretion through the kidneys and skin, reduces the load on the respiratory system. In addition, there is often an allergic component to chronic rhinitis, and improving gut integrity is a key element in regulating immune function.





Herbs used specifically for the upper respiratory system include thyme, mint, hyssop, rosemary and eucalyptus. The volatile oils contained in these herbs are what give them a strong and uplifting smell. It is these that have the added qualities of being antimicrobial and stimulating the flow of stuck mucus. The herbs can be made into a tea and drunk regularly or essential oils can be used in a steam inhalation. In the kitchen the regular use of herbs such as cinnamon, black pepper, cumin seeds, mint, onion, basil,garlic, coriander, fennel, clove, turmeric and ginger would all be of benefit.

Nose Breathing

Breathing through the nose warms and filters the air before it reaches the lungs. The resistance that the nasal passageways provide, forces the air into the lungs at a greater pressure than breathing through the mouth, resulting in better oxygen uptake and distribution throughout the body.

Nasal Cycle

Throughout the day in normal breathing there is an alternating shift in congestion and decongestion of opposite nostrils - one becomes clearer as the other becomes slightly resistant. Right nostril breathing is associated with activity of the sympathetic nervous system and results in a more active state with increased heart rate, blood pressure and body temperature. It also correlates to left brain activity which is generally analytical in nature. Left nostril breathing is induced by parasympathetic nervous activity; this induces a state of rest and restoration within the body, allowing effective digestion and nourishment. Left nostril breathing coincides with right brain activity which is visual and intuitive.



Try closing one nostril and breathing through the other, then repeat on the opposite side. Can you tell which branch of your nervous system is active at the moment? In yoga practices, alternate nostril breathing is used as a way of balancing the two sides of the nervous system. Individual nostril breathing can be used to encourage one side to become dominant, for example breathing through the left nostril before bed can have a calming effect. The current trend in society is for sympathetic overactivity - we tend to push ourselves hard without the corresponding rest in the hope of achieving more. Right nostril breathing to stimulate a more active state is generally not advisable without further understanding of the individual case.

Humming with Health

Studies at the Karolinska Institute in Sweden found that 'strong humming' causes a dramatic increase of airflow to the sinuses. Nitric oxide levels (which are anti-fungal, anti-bacterial and anti-viral) were noted to increase by 15-20%.[2] For clearing the sinuses: with the mouth closed and the tongue resting in a relaxed position on the roof of the mouth, a loud humming sound is made, pushing air out through the nose. This should be repeated between 10 and 20 times, 3 times a day. The humming should be strong enough to create some vibration within the nose, yet not make you feel dizzy.

Nasal Irrigation

It may sound like something you should do with your drains, but nasal irrigation has been used in traditional Indian medicine for thousands of years and has recently become accepted by mainstream doctors. Salt water is rinsed through the nasal passages to reduce inflammation and wash away allergens. For details on how to perform the technique look under 'Publications' on our website: **www.herbalclinic-swansea.co.uk**

1. Williams JW Jr, Aguilar C, Cornell J, et al. Antibiotics for acute maxillary sinusitis. Cochrane Database Syst Rev 2006;3:CD000243.

2. Eby, George A. Strong humming for one hour daily to terminate chronic rhinosinusitis in four days. Medical hypotheses, 2006. 66(4):851-854s

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