

Facial pain

Information for patients

Facial pain caused by sinusitis

What is sinusitis?

Sinusitis (medically known as rhinosinusitis) is an inflammation of the nose and nasal sinuses, which are spaces within the skull bones in your head which are joined to the nose. They can occasionally get infected. Because the sinuses are linked to your nose, this will generally cause nasal symptoms.

Sinusitis symptoms **always** include one of the following:

- Nasal blockage
- Nasal congestion
- Discharge from your nose.

Other symptoms can include facial pressure/pain and a loss of sense of smell, but these are not the main symptoms.

A diagnosis of chronic sinusitis is usually made by your GP, who can also offer treatment for it. Occasionally, GPs refer patients to an Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT) doctor when initial treatments have not worked or there are other complications.

Information on sinusitis can be found on the NHS inform website: www.nhsinform.scot

Facial pain with no nasal symptoms

If you have facial pain but no evidence of any nasal problems, then the pain may be coming from another source. Common causes of facial pain are your teeth, your neck and your jaw. The pain can then travel (radiate) to your face and the original source of the pain can be difficult to identify.

Migraine

The most common cause of pain affecting just one side of your face is migraine. Migraines can lead to pain anywhere over your face and don't always include a headache or seeing flashing lights. It is often described as a throbbing pain. It is worth keeping a diary of things which cause your symptoms and is best discussed with your GP. If your migraine affects your lower face it can lead to a runny or blocked nose or a swollen or red face. This is why it is often confused with sinusitis.

Sinusitis nasal symptoms are there constantly and not just when the pain is present. Most sinus infections do not cause facial swelling.

Chronic daily headache

This can be present across the forehead or behind the eyes, be severe and pounding and present most days

There is a separate advice booklet about this which is available at:

<http://neurosymptoms.org/headache/4594358011>

Trigeminal neuralgia

Trigeminal neuralgia is a much rarer cause of face pain. The trigeminal nerve is what allows us to feel sensation in various parts of the face and neuralgia is when we feel pain when there is not an underlying cause for it. This is often described as a severe shooting or stabbing pain which can be triggered by the cold, or light touches to your face. Your GP can diagnose this and help manage your pain.

Other causes

These include teeth and jaw pain, or tension from the head and neck (please see treatment sections below).

Sometimes unfortunately a cause for facial pain cannot be identified and it is known as atypical pain. This is pain where we have not been able to identify a source. Treatment for this can be difficult at times, but medications can help.

Facial pain from jaw or teeth

Facial pain can be related to your teeth and jaw. These can be made worse by grinding your teeth at night.

Signs of pain related to your jaw include:

- Pain around your jaw, ear and temple
- Clicking, popping or grinding noises when you move your jaw
- Pain around your temples
- Difficulty opening your mouth fully or if your jaw locks in place when you do so
- Pain gets worse when you are chewing or stressed.

There are things which can help with jaw-related pain that you can do yourself:

- Eat soft food
- Simple painkillers like paracetamol or ibuprofen
- Use ice or heat packs (whichever feels better) over your jaw
- Massage the painful muscles
- Relaxation.

It is worthwhile getting your teeth and jaw joint assessed by your dentist. They sometimes recommend a gumshield to be worn at night to reduce the impact of teeth grinding. This may involve a small charge.

Facial Pain from neck

Another cause of facial pain can be neck problems. If you sit at a desk with a stiff neck or tension in your neck, this can be transferred onto the muscles of your face and give you pain there. The pain is often around the eyes or forehead and can be worse when you lean forward. Your scalp, jaw, neck or cheek can be tender to touch. It is worth doing some exercises to help with this and also checking your posture and work station heights when working at a desk.

Advice on neck pain can be found on the NHS Inform website in its section on muscles, bones and joints – available at: <https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/muscle-bone-and-joints/self-management-advice/neck-problems>

This section on NHS Inform also contains some exercises that you can do to help with neck pain.

Finally, if you have any tension or stress in your life currently this can also be transferred to your face and lead to facial discomfort. Some of the following websites and helplines may be useful for you. Please contact your GP if you feel that you have difficulties that you cannot manage on your own:

- Mind: <http://www.mind.org.uk/> (for fact sheets and mental health information)
- Living Life to the Full: <https://littf.com/> (self-help for depression and anxiety related mental health issues)
- NHS Inform: <https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/mental-health> (self-help materials)
- Wellbeing Glasgow: wellbeing-glasgow.org.uk (for further self-help)

Helplines:

- Breathing Space - a mental health helpline. Tel: **0800 83 85 87**
- NHS 24 – Advice and information about how to look after yourself and treat common health problems (24 hours). Tel: **08454 24 24 24** or dial **111**
- Health in Mind Information Line - information on mental health services available in Edinburgh. **0131 243 0106**

Acknowledgements to NHS Fife. This leaflet has been adapted from NHS Fife for use in NHS Lothian.