

# THE PROFESSIONAL ASSISTANT LEARN & ADVISE



MODULE 1: MAY 2015

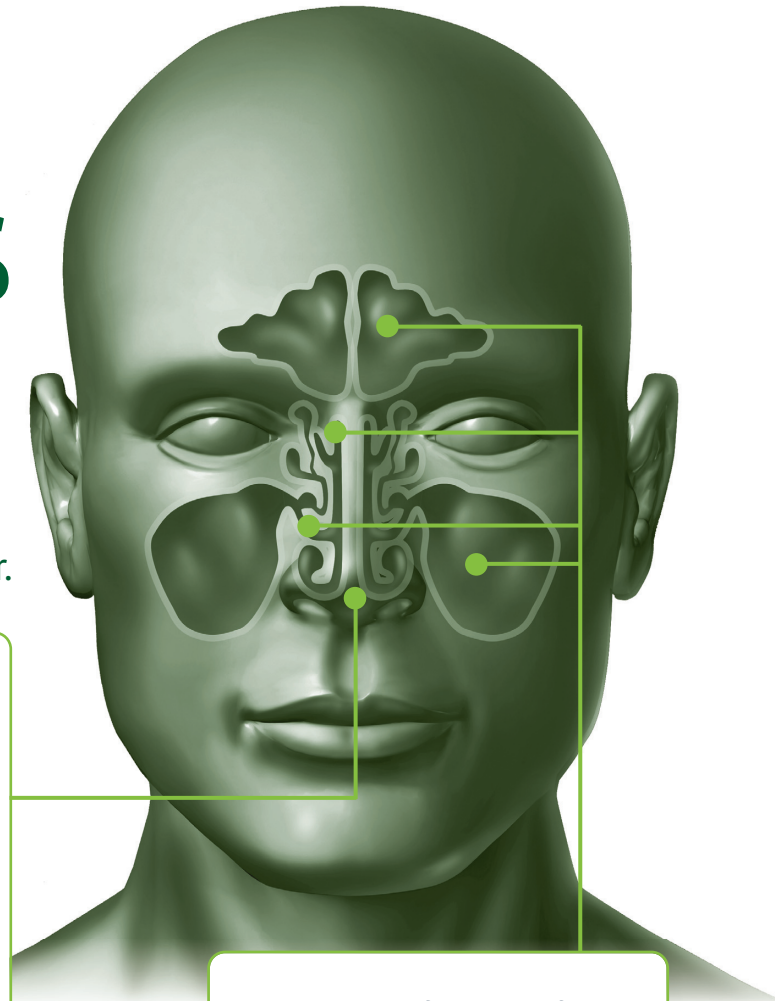
## Nasal conditions

Most of us probably don't give our noses a second thought most of the time, but if we're feeling stuffy and congested, or if our nose just won't stop running, it certainly makes us feel under the weather.

To understand how conditions affect the nose, it's important to know a little about its structure.

The nose is made up of a **combination of bone and cartilage**. At the top, around the bridge, the structure is bone. Towards the front, the nose is mostly cartilage and this continues inside, where a cartilage called the 'nasal septum' divides the nose into two halves. Air enters into each of these halves through the nostrils. Towards the back of the nose, the two nasal cavities join together.

The entire nasal cavity is **lined with a membrane** that produces a thin film of clear mucus. This helps humidify the air we breathe in and traps particles like allergens, bacteria and viruses. If the inside of the nose is too dry, its various functions will be impaired.



**The sinuses are four pairs of air-filled cavities** found in the bones of the face, around the nose and eyes. The mucus membrane that lines the nasal cavity also coats the inside of the sinuses. Mucus produced here drains into the nose. Anything that blocks this drainage can lead to a build up of pressure in the sinuses, which can be felt as sinus pain or a headache. If the sinus cavities become blocked, bacteria in the mucus may grow, leading to a sinus infection.



**OBJECTIVES** | After studying this module, assistants will:

- Have a basic understanding of the structure of the nose
- Be familiar with common conditions that affect the nose
- Know what treatment options are available to relieve these conditions.



This module is suitable for all members of the pharmacy team who wish to increase their knowledge of common conditions and their treatment options. This module has been endorsed with the NPA's Training Seal as suitable for use by pharmacy teams as part of their ongoing learning. This module can also form part of your Team Tuesday training.



**DID YOU KNOW?...**  
Exposure to dry air can lead to stuffy noses, particularly in babies.



## Understanding the problem

Whether they're caused by an infection or an allergy, nasal conditions such as rhinitis, nasal congestion, sinusitis and post-nasal drip are some of the most common complaints seen in pharmacy.

Many of these conditions tend to have some degree of overlap, so it can be difficult to distinguish between them. For instance, it's possible for someone with rhinitis to also report nasal congestion, or someone with a stuffy nose to also suffer from sinus pain. It's therefore important to ask customers to describe their symptoms carefully as this will help you to offer effective treatment and advice.

### Sinusitis

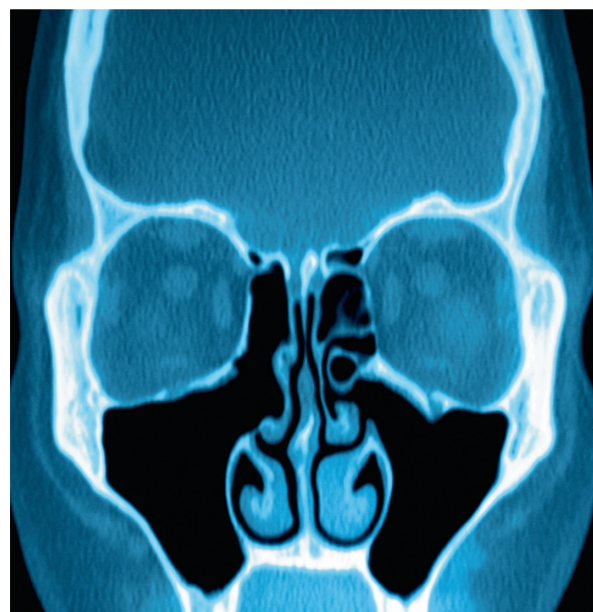
**The term sinusitis simply means that the sinuses are inflamed, and this is usually caused by an infection or an allergy.**

Normally, mucus drains through small channels into the nose. However, if these channels get blocked, the sinuses can become congested and inflamed.

Sinusitis is often acute (lasting two to three weeks). However, it can be chronic (lasting up to 12 weeks). Symptoms may include:

- Pain or tenderness in the forehead, cheeks or around the eyes, which is worse on stooping down
- Headache
- Fever
- A blocked or runny nose
- Cough
- Loss of smell or taste
- Bad breath.

In addition, nasal secretions may be thick and range in colour from white to yellow/green or even tinged with blood. This may indicate an infection, so refer these customers to the pharmacist.



### Rhinitis

**Rhinitis is the medical term for inflammation and swelling of the mucus membrane inside the nose. This inflammation increases the amount of mucus produced and, as a result, customers may complain of a runny nose, sneezing, nasal congestion and a feeling of mucus dripping or trickling down the back of their throat.**

Rhinitis can be defined by the duration of symptoms – acute (short-lived) or chronic (longer-lasting). Here, we focus on acute rhinitis:

1

#### Acute allergic rhinitis

Allergic rhinitis is triggered by an allergic reaction to an allergen such as pollen, pet dander or house dust mites.

2

#### Acute non-allergic rhinitis

Non-allergic rhinitis can be caused by:

- **A viral infection** – e.g. the common cold
- **Environmental factors** – e.g. a dry atmosphere, smoke, a change in temperature
- **Hormonal imbalance** – e.g. during pregnancy, puberty or when taking oral contraceptives or hormone replacement therapy
- **Rebound congestion** – the medical name for this is 'rhinitis medicamentosa' and it is caused by the overuse of nasal decongestants. You may have heard it referred to as rebound congestion. Anyone with repeated symptoms of congestion following use of a nasal decongestant, should be referred to the pharmacist.

### Post-nasal drip

**Normally, all mucus secretions from the nose drain to the back of the throat and are swallowed in a process we're not usually aware of.** However, sometimes a person may feel as if mucus is accumulating at the back of their throat. This is termed 'post-nasal drip'. A person may describe this as a feeling of mucus dripping or trickling down the back of their throat, which may trigger coughing.

Post-nasal drip may occur when a person is suffering from a cold or an allergy.





## Don't forget...

Nasal decongestants such as oxymetazoline and xylometazoline should only be used by adults as instructed. Prolonged use can cause symptoms to reappear after stopping. This is known as 'rebound congestion'.



## DID YOU KNOW?...

Allergic rhinitis affects around one in every five people in the UK.

### Added advice

Pass on the following advice to help customers stay congestion-free and breathing easy:

- Keep nasal passages moist by using sea water or saline sprays or washes
- Drink plenty of fluids
- Use steam inhalation. A hot steamy

shower or a vaporiser may help

- Do not smoke and avoid smoky atmospheres
- Be scrupulous about personal hygiene. Cover the nose and mouth when sneezing; wash hands regularly; discard used tissues immediately
- Raise the head of the bed a few inches or use extra pillows to ease any breathing difficulties.

## Treatment options

The treatment of choice will depend on an individual's symptoms and their cause, although this may not always be obvious. Ask the WWHAM questions and refer to your pharmacist when necessary.

### 1

### Sea water and saline nasal sprays

Nasal sprays based on natural ingredients such as sea water or saline can provide relief from a number of nasal conditions.

Products containing sea water (e.g. Stérimar Nasal Hygiene) work by washing away allergens and rebalancing nasal functions. Some have additional ingredients such as manganese, calcium and purified water (e.g. Stérimar Stop & Protect Allergy Response) to deactivate allergens in the nose and form a barrier to prevent allergens from irritating the nasal mucosa. These products can be used alone or alongside medication and are suitable for pregnant women, babies and those who cannot take medicated treatments.

### 2

### Decongestants

Decongestants work by constricting the blood vessels in the lining of the nose, reducing swelling and opening up the nasal passages. Decongestants are not usually recommended for children under 12, breastfeeding women or those who have certain health conditions, such as high blood pressure. They should also be avoided by anyone taking antidepressants called monoamine oxidase inhibitors.

Decongestants are available as:

- **Tablets** – useful for people who want a convenient, long-lasting treatment. Examples include phenylephrine (e.g. Non-Drowsy Sudafed Congestion & Headache Relief Capsules) and pseudoephedrine (e.g. Contac Non Drowsy 12 Hour Relief)
- **Nasal sprays or drops** – useful for people who want immediate relief. Examples include xylometazoline (e.g. Otrivine Nasal Spray range) and oxymetazoline (e.g. Vicks Sinex Decongestant Nasal Spray), which are effective for eight to 12 hours. Also available are shorter-acting ingredients such as ephedrine and phenylephrine (e.g. Fenox Nasal Drops).



### 3

### Corticosteroids

Corticosteroids are anti-inflammatory drugs available as nasal sprays for allergic rhinitis. Examples include beclometasone (e.g. Beconase Hayfever) and fluticasone (e.g. Pirinase Hayfever).

### When to refer

You should refer a customer to the pharmacist if they:

- Have symptoms which are severe or last longer than 10 days
- Have a fever lasting for more than three days
- Produce nasal discharge that is yellow/green and accompanied by sinus pain or pressure
- Have blood in their nasal discharge or a persistent clear discharge after a head injury
- Notice a change in vision or swelling around their eyes
- Are a baby with nasal congestion that is causing feeding difficulties
- Are a child who may have a foreign object inside their nose
- Have symptoms that initially improve but then worsen
- Are taking prescribed medication for a long-term medical condition
- Have symptoms that persist despite the use of appropriate OTC medication.



### SIGNPOSTING

For more information, you can:

- Use your *Counter Intelligence* Plus training guide
- Visit Allergy UK at: [www.allergyuk.org](http://www.allergyuk.org) or call: 01322 619898
- Visit Action Against Allergy at: [www.actionagainstallergy.co.uk](http://www.actionagainstallergy.co.uk) or call: 020 8892 2711

# TEST YOURSELF

GOOD PRACTICE KNOWLEDGE IS IMPORTANT WHEN ADVISING CUSTOMERS



## Questions

1) Which of the following statements is **TRUE**?

- a) The nasal cavity is lined with a membrane that produces a thin film of clear mucus
- b) This mucus helps to dry the air we breathe in
- c) If the inside of the nose is too moist, its functions will be impaired
- d) The sinuses are made up of two pairs of cavities in the bones of the face

2) What can cause rhinitis?

- a) An allergen (e.g. pollen)
- b) A cold
- c) Hormonal imbalance
- d) All of the above

3) Who would you refer to the pharmacist? A customer who has:

- a) Symptoms lasting longer than seven days
- b) A fever lasting less than three days
- c) Blood in their nasal discharge
- d) Clear discharge following a cold

4) How do sea water nasal sprays relieve congestion?

- a) By washing away allergens and rebalancing nasal functions
- b) By constricting blood vessels in the lining of the nose
- c) By opening up the nasal passages
- d) None of the above

5) What other advice could you offer your customer?

- a) Drink plenty of fluids
- b) Use steam inhalation
- c) Don't smoke
- d) All of the above

6) Which of the following statements is **TRUE**?

- a) Sea water nasal sprays can provide relief from nasal congestion
- b) There are no limitations on the duration of treatment with OTC decongestant sprays
- c) Allowing the nasal passages to dry out is a good thing
- d) None of the above



## Scenario

John is a regular customer at your pharmacy. He mentions that he can't stop sneezing and his nose feels stuffy. He tells you that he often gets hayfever at this time of year. After asking the WWHAM questions, you establish that John has high blood pressure that is under control and he would prefer a nasal spray as he dislikes taking tablets.

### What would you recommend?

For each part of this scenario, think about the decision you would make and, importantly, why you would choose that option. In addition, for each decision that you make, think about how you would talk to the customer and provide the necessary advice. You can discuss this with your team and pharmacist.

1

Refer to the pharmacist and, following this discussion, recommend a nasal spray based on natural sea water, which is suitable for John to take alongside his blood pressure medication.

2

Suggest various options that are available OTC, such as oral decongestants, topical decongestants and natural nasal sprays.

#### What if?

John tells you that he has a nine-year-old son, Peter, who also suffers from hayfever. He asks whether the sea water nasal spray would be suitable for him.

1

Yes. Peter can use the same product.

2

No. Peter would benefit from a different product.

#### What if?

John has nasal discharge that has changed in colour and is accompanied by sinus pain or pressure.

1

Recommend a topical decongestant and tell John to return if his symptoms have not improved in two weeks.

2

Refer John to the pharmacist for further advice.

3

Refer John to A&E.



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