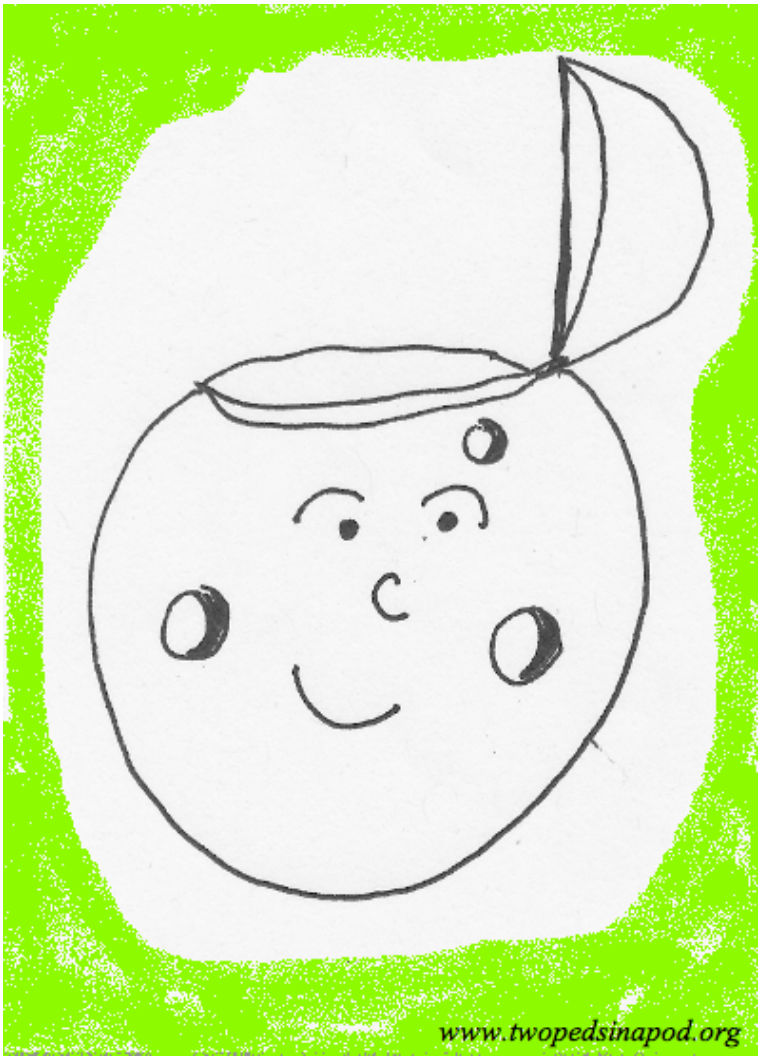
Sinus infection or a cold?



Holes in your head – sinus infections

You have a hole in your head.
Actually, you have several.
You, your children, and everyone else.

These dratted air pockets in your skull can fill with pus and cause sinus infections. Scientists hypothesize they once helped us equilibrate in water while swimming. Now, sinuses seem only to cause headaches.

Sinuses are wedged in your cheek bones (maxillary sinuses), behind your nose (ethmoid sinuses) and in the bones over your

forehead (frontal sinuses). When your child has a cold or allergies, fluid can build up in the sinuses. Normally, the sinuses drain into the back of your nose. If your child's sinuses don't drain because of unlucky anatomy, the sludge from her cold may become superinfected with bacteria and becomes too thick to move. Subsequently, pressure builds up in her sinuses and causes pain. A sinus infection of the frontal sinuses manifests itself as pressure over the forehead. The pain is exacerbated when she bends her head forward because the fluid sloshes around in the sinuses. Since frontal sinuses do not fully develop until around ten years old, young children escape frontal sinus infections.

Another sign of infection is the increased urge to brush the top row of teeth because the roots of the teeth protrude near the maxillary sinuses. Kids with sinusitis sometimes complain that their teeth hurt. Bad breath caused by bacterial infested post nasal drip can also be a sign. Occasionally kids with sinus infections develop swelling above or below the eyes, giving a puffy look to their faces.

The nasal discharge associated with bacterial sinus infections can be green/yellow and gooey. However, nasal drainage from a cold virus is often green/yellow and gooey as well. If your child has green boogies on the third or fourth day of a cold, does not have a fever, and is comfortable, have patience. The color should revert to clear. However, if the cold continues past ten days, studies have shown that a large percentage of the nasal secretions have developed into a bacterial sinus infection. To further confuse things for parents: a child can have a really yucky thick green/yellow runny nose and have "just a cold" or they can have clear secretions and have a sinus infection. In this case, the duration of symptoms is a clue to whether your child's runny nose is from a cold or from a sinus infection.

Because toddlers in group childcare often have back-to-back colds, it may seem as if he constantly has a bacterial sinus infection. However, if there is a break in symptoms, even for one day, it is a sign that a cold has ended, and the new runny nose represents a new cold virus. Pediatric trivia: the

average young child gets 8-10 colds per year, and colds last up to 10-14 days, sometimes even as long as three weeks. However, a cold seems better after 10 days even if some cough or mild nasal congestion lingers. Sinusitis is the cold that seems WORSE after ten days.

Hydrate your child well when she has a sinus infection. Your child's body will use the liquid to dilute some of the goo and the thinner goo will be easier for her body to drain. Since sinus infections are caused by bacteria, your pediatrician may recommend an antibiotic. The usual duration of the medicine is ten days, but for chronic sinus infections, two to four weeks may be necessary. Misnamed, "sinus washes" do not penetrate deep into the sinuses; however, they can give relief by mobilizing nasal secretions. When using a wash, ask the pharmacist for one with a low flow. Although the over the counter cold and sinus medicines claim to offer relief, they may have more side effects than good effects. Avoid using them in young children and infants. One safe and reliable way to soothe the nasal stuffiness of a sinus infection is to use simple saline nasal spray as often as needed.

Who knows. Someday we'll discover a purpose to having gooey pockets in our skulls. In the meantime, you can tease your children about the holes in their heads.

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