The Difference Between Sinus Headaches and Migraines

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Sinus Headache or Migraine

Migraine headaches plague thousands of people, and many will insist that the only thing worse than the pain is going for years without the proper treatment. Unfortunately, migraine symptoms are variable, difficult to define, and challenging to measure, which means that even medical professionals could misinterpret the symptoms.

Overcoming the painful consequences of misdiagnosis and mismanagement will take close attention and an open-minded approach. You may have to visit a few different doctors before landing on the right diagnosis and a good treatment plan – in fact, over 60% of migraine sufferers have had a bad experience with a doctor, deciding not to return. The solution begins with self-education, good communication, and perhaps a consultation with a headache specialist to determine what your symptoms are really telling you.

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Migraines are often misdiagnosed as sinus problems by doctors and patients alike, perhaps because sinus conditions and chronic headaches are often thought to be unrelated. In reality, more than 80% of migraine sufferers also complain of sinus pain and pressure.

A major problem behind the misdiagnosis is the fact that sinus trouble and migraine share some common aspects. One condition can effectively hide behind the other, since each can involve:

- **Nasal congestion.** When you're feeling stuffed up, it's natural to blame seasonal allergies, a sinus infection or a nasty cold. Most people don't imagine that migraines can also bring sinus pressure and clear mucus, but 50% of migraine sufferers experience nasal congestion and a runny nose.
- **Reactions to weather changes.** Changes in barometric pressure, humidity and temperature can wreak havoc on a variety of systems, but are very often felt in the head. A majority of migraine sufferers report that weather has an undeniable effect on their pain, but those who have not been diagnosed with migraines could easily misread their symptoms as the signs of a coming illness or the onset of seasonal allergies.
- **Food triggers.** Preservatives and additives in food have been known to bring on migraines, but a food allergy can spark uncomfortable symptoms, too. A reaction to the histamine in some foods can cause headaches, itching and sneezing, and so some cases of migraine could be mistaken for a food allergy.

Although they can be difficult to tell apart, there are a few clear warning signs that you're suffering from migraine rather than a sinus headache. For instance, nausea, vomiting and sensitivity to light are common symptoms of migraines, but rarely come with sinus headaches or congestion.

The Importance of an Accurate Diagnosis

A misdiagnosis will cause a lot of undue pain and stress, but ignoring migraine symptoms can also lead to more

dangerous outcomes. When chronic migraines are left untreated, the risk of stroke, dental infections, aneurysms and coma will increase, but you may not realize the threat until you’re in the midst of a medical emergency. And when migraines are misdiagnosed as depression or stress-induced symptoms, patients may be prescribed unnecessary medication that could bring side effects without much relief.

Once a migraine diagnosis is confirmed, you can focus on prevention – a key component in any treatment plan. The sooner you can isolate your trigger foods, major stressors, sleep problems and hormone fluctuations, the more thoroughly you will be able to treat an oncoming migraine. So, if you have been living with certain discomforts and are unable to get relief from typical pain relievers or relaxation therapies, it may be time to investigate your condition with the help of a neurologist.