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Allergies Health Center

Allergy Self-Diagnosis Leads to Misdiagnosis

Survey Shows Many Americans Confuse Allergies and Sinus Infections

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WebMD Health News

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May 18, 2011 -- Many people misdiagnose themselves as having [allergies](#) when they actually have [sinusitis](#), a survey shows, and skip a visit to the doctor.

The survey was conducted by the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America (AAFA).

The AAFA says that when people confuse sinusitis symptoms with [signs of allergies](#), they often suffer longer than they would if they visited a doctor, who could make a proper diagnosis.

The AAFA says symptoms of sinusitis are similar to signs of allergies, but that too many people try to diagnose themselves.

According to a survey of 621 people, conducted online from a database of asthma and allergy patients, about 70% of sinusitis sufferers most trust a primary care doctor to correctly diagnose symptoms, yet only 36% go to one for help.

[Slideshow: Sinusitis 101](#)

Self-Diagnosis Can Be Counterproductive

Among the findings of the survey:

- 47% of respondents with sinusitis admit to self-diagnosing when they have symptoms.

- 37% are doing more self-diagnosing now than they were five years ago.

- 41% of those who say it is not easy to distinguish signs of allergies from signs of sinusitis still go ahead and diagnose themselves when they have symptoms.

- 51% admit they have misdiagnosed themselves as suffering from allergies when the cause turned out to be sinusitis.

- 39% say they think it's hard to tell the difference between the symptoms of a cold, [flu](#), allergies, and sinusitis.

- 55% of people who have heard of chronic sinusitis underestimate the minimum number of weeks this condition may last; 39% admit they don't have a clue about duration.

- Only 26% of respondents who had heard of chronic sinusitis were aware that a minimally invasive treatment option exists for the condition.

- 49% of respondents have never seen an [ear](#), nose, and throat doctor about their sinusitis.

Allergies vs. Chronic Sinusitis

Mike Tringale, vice president of external affairs at the AAFA, says in a news release that there's a key difference between allergies and chronic sinusitis.

"If you have allergy-like symptoms that last longer than 12 weeks, or symptoms that occur more than three times per year, with symptoms usually lasting more than 20 days despite treatment attempts, you may have chronic sinusitis and should see a doctor for a correct diagnosis and the right medical solution," he says.

About 7 million Americans suffer from chronic sinusitis, resulting in some 32 million cases reported by doctors and other health care providers every year.

The survey was released to coincide with the peak of [spring allergy](#) season, which makes it important for people with symptoms to see a specialist, says the AAFA.

Stacey Silvers, MD, of Beth Israel Hospital in New York, says chronic sinusitis has been underdiagnosed for many years.

Because so many people are confused about treatment of the chronic sinusitis and more than 50% of people do not respond adequately to [medications](#), "it's important that they consult with an ear, nose and throat physician to get the most appropriate treatment to alleviate long-term suffering," she says.

Common symptoms of sinusitis include:

- Facial pain
- Nasal congestion
- Yellow or green mucus in the nose
- Fever

Some cases of chronic sinusitis due to infection are treated with antibiotics.

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