

Sinus Headaches vs. Migraines

Comprehensive Care for Headaches & Migraines

At Willamette Ear, Nose, Throat, we see many patients who come into our office seeking treatment for sinus infections when they are suffering from a migraine or tension headache instead. This is common because migraines irritate the trigeminal cranial nerve that spans the forehead, cheeks, jaw and sinus cavity.

Pain in the sinuses does not automatically constitute a sinus disorder. Sinus headaches are not a medical diagnosis, but rather a description of a headache caused by pressure that spans the sinus area.

People with migraine and tension headaches may also have nasal and sinus symptoms such as runny nose, nasal congestion, sinus pressure and pain.

As many as 80 percent of patients reporting sinus headaches have migraines or tension headaches rather than a sinus infection.

Symptoms that migraine/tension headaches and sinusitis share include:

- Pain and pressure around the eyes, cheeks and forehead.
- Nasal congestion.
- Postnasal drainage.
- Runny/stuffy nose.
- Red, swollen or watery eyes.

These shared symptoms often can make it difficult for patients to separate these two conditions.

Those experiencing sinusitis will suffer from thick nasal discharge, which is often discolored or cloudy, nasal congestion, facial pain and pressure of the sinuses, and may have a mild fever.

Migraines and tension headaches are typically treated with over-the-counter and prescription medications. You may be referred to your primary care physician or a pain specialist for further management.

Headaches caused by sinusitis are treated by addressing the underlying cause.

Your otolaryngologist will help you determine the cause of your headaches. Willamette Ear, Nose, Throat offers a comprehensive center for diagnosing and treating allergies and sinusitis.