



Mucolytic Agents & Decongestants

Mucolytic agents

(Guaifenesin Mucinex® Humibid LA®) are drugs that thin mucus and secretions, so they can drain out of the sinuses more easily. They may be helpful for people suffering from a thick post-nasal drip. Often, they are found in combination preparations with decongestants and/or antihistamines. Most are well tolerated and have few side effects such as headache, rash, or nausea.

Topical Nasal Decongestants

Topical nasal decongestants (Afrin® or Neosynephrine®) in the form of drops or sprays that are placed in the nose can be very effective in shrinking nasal swelling in minutes. However, these sprays should be used no longer than 2 or 3 consecutive days, for prolonged usage may result in "rebound" swelling of the nose. Rebound swelling (known as "rhinitis medicamentosa") can be extremely difficult to treat because the nose may no longer respond normally to the decongestant spray. We advise that use the brands that contain oxymetazoline in preference to those that have phenylephrine as their active ingredient. The safe use of these medications sometimes can be extended by using the medicine only at bedtime, in alternating nostrils every other night. For example, on the first night only the right nostril receives medicine and on the second night the medicine is placed in your left nostril. By doing this some patients can double the safe use of oxymetazoline.

Systemic Decongestants

If more prolonged decongestant therapy is required, systemic decongestants may be used. The most well know brand is Sudafed®. It comes in varying strengths and is purchased over the counter. Psuedoephedrine can be found as part of a combination medication with some antihistamines such as Allegra® or Claritin®. These agents have the same effect in decreasing the swelling of the lining of the nose and promoting drainage of the sinuses. However, since higher concentrations are present in the bloodstream, systemic decongestants are more likely to produce side-effects. These include high blood pressure, anxiety, difficulty sleeping, and the "jitters." Decongestants can also cause blurry vision (in patients who suffer from glaucoma) and difficulty urinating in patients with prostate problems. You should let your doctor know if you are currently taking any medications for depression (such as MAOIs - monoamine oxidase inhibitors, or tricyclic antidepressants), since these medications can have serious adverse effects when they interact with either topical or systemic decongestants.