

Patients Find Relief From Persistent Sinus Pain & Misery After Undergoing New, Minimally Invasive Procedure

For one nurse, the blockages in her sinuses had gotten so bad she could no longer smell the food she cooked for her family's dinner – nor the baby's diaper. In another case, an attorney with no family history of allergies began experiencing head pains and could not breathe through his nose.

Both of these patients – who continued to suffer despite using over-the-counter medications and prescription nasal sprays – were eventually diagnosed with chronic sinusitis, an inflammation of the sinus cavities often caused by an infection.

And both of these patients found relief after undergoing a minimally-invasive surgical procedure known as *balloon sinuplasty*. Dr. Mark Zeme, a board-certified ear, nose and throat specialist (ENT) at Eden Medical Center, performed the surgery for both patients who were able to return home within hours of the operation.

The centerpiece of the balloon sinuplasty surgical technique is a small, flexible catheter, similar to catheters used in the heart for angioplasties. The catheter is threaded into the sinus passageway and the attached balloon is gently inflated, widening the passages to clear blocked sinuses, restore normal sinus drainage and function, and preserve sinus anatomy. Because this procedure eliminates any need to remove tissue or bone, bleeding, pain and scarring are minimized.

Helen Pandina's story

Helen Pandina, a post-surgical nurse in the East Bay, developed serious allergies after leaving her home state of Montana and moving to California seven years ago. She did not attribute her runny nose to allergies, thinking instead that she had chronic colds due to lack of sleep and raising four children.

After a visit to her primary care physician, Helen received temporary relief from her symptoms by using a nasal spray. Since she did not take breaks from the medication, however, a rebound effect caused her problems to recur. "My pattern was to be in pain every other month," Helen recalls. "I suffered from face pain, teeth pain, headaches and post nasal drip. It was hard to eat and I couldn't taste my food."

Her headaches became more frequent and finally an excruciating migraine landed her in the emergency room where an initial CT scan revealed that she had a sinus infection. Helen was then referred to Dr. Zeme who informed her that all eight of her sinus cavities were completely clogged – which meant the ducts that should have allowed easy drainage were too narrow for anything to flow through them.

Within two weeks, Helen was admitted to Eden Medical Center, underwent surgery with Dr. Zeme and after several days of post-surgery discomfort, her symptoms subsided. "I could breathe more easily and about four weeks after surgery, I actually had my sense of

smell back.” Helen also said, “I loved Eden Medical Center – everything went really smoothly; everyone was really pleasant. On a scale of 1-10 I would give Eden a 10.”

Jackson Long’s story

Jackson Long, an East Bay attorney, also underwent a period of trying various treatments as Helen did before he was finally diagnosed with sinusitis. For more than a year, Jackson felt what he calls a “squooching” feeling in his ears, much like what some swimmers experience after getting out of the water. He went to an ENT specialist who tested his hearing with a tuning fork and found it to be normal. Further testing, however, showed that his sinuses were the culprit so he began using a prescription nasal spray. The following year, however, his symptoms returned and his head pain worsened.

“By the time I saw Dr. Zeme,” Jackson says, “my sinuses were so swollen I had trouble breathing! I was in a lot of pain and I felt like my head was under water.” Dr. Zeme diagnosed Jackson with severe sinusitis, including a great deal of infection and blockage because of scar tissue.

Within days of the balloon sinuplasty surgery, Jackson reports his breathing became easier and in the nine months since undergoing the procedure, he has been symptom free. “Dr. Zeme was terrific,” Jackson recalls. “His manner was completely professional and my experience at Eden Medical Center was first rate. I would recommend Dr. Zeme and Eden anytime.”

While both Helen and Jack benefited from balloon sinuplasty, Dr. Zeme says patients who have the surgery must continue protecting their sinuses from irritation and flush their nasal passages daily. But those good health practices are minor inconveniences, especially when compared to the pain of sinusitis. As Helen says, “I’m thrilled with the results.”

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