Sinus Infection

What is a sinus infection?
The sinuses are a labyrinth of air pockets throughout the bones of the face—two pockets in the forehead, one at the back of the nose, one between each eye and the nose, and one in each cheek. They produce secretions that wash away dust particles, bacteria and other pollutants from the air we breathe. Pain develops when the mucous lining of the sinuses becomes inflamed.

What is the difference between a cold and a sinus infection?
A common cold lasts 7–10 days and clears up on its own. Nasal congestion responds well to over-the-counter decongestants.

A sinus infection lasts more than 7–10 days. With sinus infection, at least three of the following symptoms occur: nasal congestion with poor response to over-the-counter decongestants, fever, malaise, cough, toothache, headache, or facial pain that increases when you lower your head.

What should I do for a sinus infection?
• Drink lots of fluid: 10-12 glasses a day. This helps to thin secretions, making it easier to get rid of them.
• If stuffiness is your only symptom, use a decongestant such as Sudafed. You must ask for pseudoephedrine at the pharmacist counter.
• If you are experiencing headache or facial pain, take Tylenol or Advil. Be sure to take Advil with food.
• If you have allergies, take an antihistamine. This decreases the release of histamine, which can contribute to sinus inflammation. If you have sinusitis and no allergies, antihistamines can dry out the sinuses and prevent them from draining properly.
• If you have a cough, use an expectorant-suppressant such as Robitussin.

When should I call the Student Health Center?
If symptoms last more than one to two weeks or if you have three or more of the sinus infection symptoms listed above, see your doctor.

Student Health Center
Special Programs Building
28 Westhampton Way
Univeristy of Richmond, VA 23173

Phone (804) 289-8064
Dial-A-Nurse (804) 289-8700
Fax (804) 287-6466

wellness.richmond.edu