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Minimally-invasive relief for sinus trouble

Patients suffering from pain and pressure caused by chronic sinus problems can get relief in the comfort of a physician's office, thanks to a procedure offered by local ear, nose and throat specialist Mark Wallace, D.O.

Balloon Sinuplasty involves the insertion of a specially-designed catheter into the patient's nose and up into the inflamed sinus cavity, where a balloon is then inflated. The process reshapes and widens the sinus passage, allowing mucus to drain from blocked sinuses. Dr. Wallace has been performing the procedure since 2007.

"This really opens up the sinuses and allows them to get better aerated and drain better in a very minimally-invasive way," he explained. "It preserves all of the normal anatomy, which is different from the prior ways of doing sinus surgery."

While the procedure is a familiar one, the location is a new development. Patients can choose to have balloon sinuplasty in a War Memorial Hospital operating room or they can have it performed in the doctor's office.

The biggest difference is the use of anesthesia. In the hospital, patients are put under general anesthesia, while the office uses a local. Since the patient is awake in the office, a good amount of time is spent numbing the area, according to Dr. Wallace.

"The patient will feel some sensation, but not pain. We spend a lot of time making sure of that. For instance, we'll use a topical anesthetic and then wait 20 minutes or so before injecting more anesthesia and then wait for that to take effect. After that, they will feel pressure, but not pain."

It is often a matter of personal choice whether a patient has the procedure in the office or in the hospital. Because the patient is awake, they will be able to see what is happening. "If you can handle a dental procedure in the office, you can handle this," the doctor added.

Recovery requires maybe a day or two of rest to make sure any bleeding is minimal. After recovery, the speed with which a patient will notice improvement varies.

"Some patients will notice improvement right away and others it takes longer, depending upon the underlying problem with the sinuses," Wallace explained.

Most people with chronic sinusitis can benefit from the procedure – but not all. People who have previously had sinus surgery, for instance, are not candidates for balloon sinuplasty. Additionally, Wallace said that some people just have particularly bad sinuses and no procedure will eliminate future sinus infections. But in the majority of cases, the procedure can make a difference.

"For people who are in a bad cycle but don't have bad sinuses, this can break them out of that cycle and get them well indefinitely," he said.

If you are wondering whether this procedure is right for you, talk to your primary care doctor or make an appointment to see Dr. Wallace by calling Soo Otolaryngology at (906) 259-0244.