NASAL IRRIGATION FOR SINUS CONGESTION

Upper respiratory infections ("colds") and sinus infections are a common affliction in the dry climate of Fairbanks. Often resolving without use of antibiotics, or even any medications, some of the discomfort can be alleviated by moisturizing the mucosa. Nasal saline, or salt water, in a squeeze bottle, is the easiest to use, and can help with clearing thickened discharge from a common cold. In persons with a history of sinus infection, this treatment begun at the onset of cold symptoms can decrease the risk of progression to a full sinus infection, and relieves pressure and congestion. Others find increased relief from a larger quantity of water as applied with a Neti pot or syringe. This physically removes some of the discharge, and relieves congestion and pressure. It also improves the function of the cilia, small hairs lining the sinuses. The cilia aid the clearance of discharge from the sinuses.

Neti pots were recently in the news after two people in Louisiana got amoebic brain infections from using tap water for irrigation. Updated instructions suggest boiling water prior to use in irrigation to avoid this. However, our drinking water in Fairbanks is too cold for survival of the organism at fault in Louisiana, so use of Fairbanks or UAF tap water should be fine. (However, if one is immune compromised, using boiled or distilled water would be safer.) To prevent reinfection of oneself, however, wash your pot, bottle, or syringe in hot soapy water after each use, sterilize or replace every two to three weeks, and don’t share your equipment with anyone else.

Directions and recipes are available on the web (eg from the American Academy of allergy, Asthma and Immunology), or at the Student Health Center for those who have paid the health center fee.

References

UptoDate, referenced 1/31/12

Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation, verbal communication, 1/31/12