

# A breath of fresh air for sinus sufferers

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**INSERTING A BALLOON** — *Dr. Devang Shah performs balloon sinus dilation on an awake, comfortable patient in his Orange City office.*

For the millions of Americans who suffer from the debilitating symptoms of chronic sinusitis — headaches, sinus congestion, and facial pain and pressure — there's a new procedure that can be life-changing. And the key is a very small balloon.

Most people who suffer from recurrent or persistent sinusitis continuously cycle through decongestants, antibiotics and nasal steroids as the infections come and go.

"It never quit," one patient told us. "Once I got off antibiotics, the pressure would rebuild because the infection was still there, and my head always felt full."

When the drugs cannot provide sufficient relief, the "last resort" for many patients has been endoscopic sinus surgery, a hospital procedure requiring a general anesthetic. It's safe and effective, but recovery can take a week or more.

The exciting new alternative is balloon sinus dilation, a safe and comfortable procedure performed in the doctor's office that restores normal sinus drainage and function, usually in under an hour. Because the procedure is done under a local anesthetic, patients simply get up and go home.

Here's how it works: The physician carefully guides a small, flexible balloon catheter into the patient's blocked sinus passageway, aided by a light on the catheter and a tiny camera that sends a live picture to a video monitor. The balloon is then inflated, expanding the passage by gently reshaping the tiny eggshell bones of the sinus.

The new opening stays in position, allowing normal drainage. Most patients experience instant relief and what one described as "a powerful sense of freedom" as air begins to circulate normally through the previously blocked passages.

The actual duration of the procedure depends on how many sinuses are affected, but with no cutting or drilling involved, healing is immediate — most patients resume normal activity within 48 hours.

The procedure is more than 97-percent effective, and multiple studies have found that it reduces subsequent sinus infections by about three-quarters, which frees patients from the endless drug cycle and dramatically improves their quality of life and productivity at work.

Balloon dilation catheters have been cleared by the Food and Drug Administration to treat obstructive disease of the sinuses, and the procedure is usually covered by health insurance. It's not for every sinus sufferer, and an exam is required to determine whether a patient is a candidate for the balloon. But for those who are, balloon dilation is a ticket to freedom from the recurrent, pounding headaches and endless draining of chronic sinusitis.

As one patient told us, "This procedure changed my life."

— **BY DR. DEVANG SHAH AND DR. DANIEL ROTHBAUM**, SPECIAL TO THE BEACON. *Devang Shah, M.D., and Daniel Rothbaum, M.D., are board-certified otolaryngologists practicing in Lake Mary and Orange City. Call their offices at 407-774-9880 or 386-774-9880.*