

Procedure provides relief for chronic sinusitis sufferers



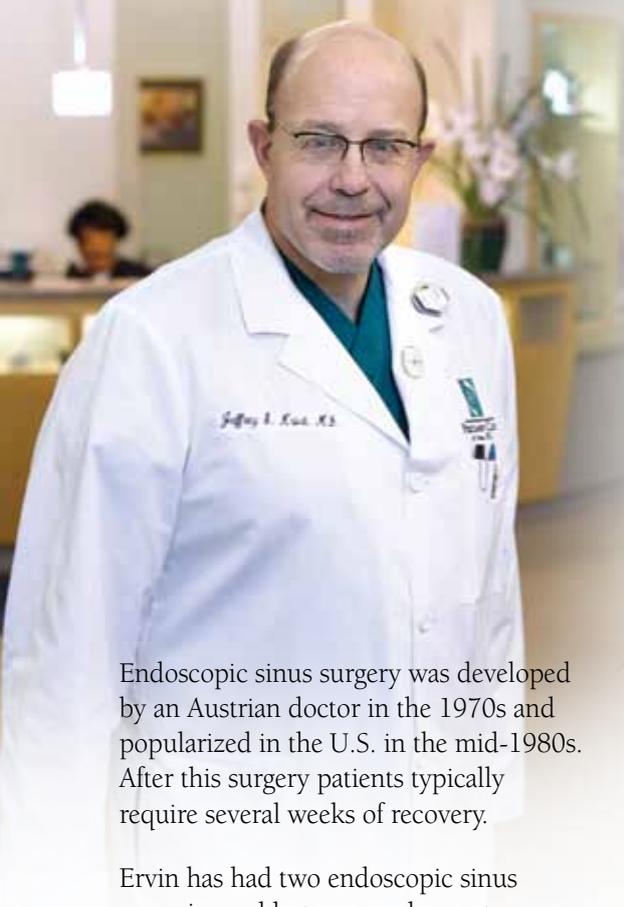
Louie Ervin, Sr. has suffered with chronic sinusitis for most of his life. The 62-year-old grew up in Missouri farm country and has spent the last two decades in Cedar Rapids.

“Pretty much all of my life I have been around grain,” said Ervin. “Unfortunately, I am allergic to mold and dust. The grain dust that is prevalent around Iowa and the Midwest can irritate my sinuses. When this happens my sinuses become inflamed, which often leads to a secondary infection and I have to go on antibiotics to get rid of it.”

Ervin is hardly alone. For 37 million Americans sinusitis is a chronic disease. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) reports sinusitis is among the most common illnesses in the U.S., which leads to 300,000 surgeries a year.

Symptoms include repeated infections, headaches, facial pain, congestion and fatigue. Surgery is usually a last resort after all other medical treatments fail. Until recently, the surgical option was endoscopic sinus surgery, which typically involves using surgical instruments to remove small amounts of bone, polyps and other material blocking the sinus openings.

Louie Ervin and his grandson Saul at his cabin in Robins.



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Physicians' Clinic of Iowa, P.C.

Endoscopic sinus surgery was developed by an Austrian doctor in the 1970s and popularized in the U.S. in the mid-1980s. After this surgery patients typically require several weeks of recovery.

Ervin has had two endoscopic sinus surgeries and last year underwent a newer procedure called a balloon sinuplasty.

“The previous surgeries probably helped some but really didn't provide me with the level of relief I needed,” said Ervin. “When my doctor talked to me about balloon sinuplasty I was definitely interested. I was still having quite a bit of trouble with sinus infections. I thought it couldn't hurt. I was willing to give it a try.”

Ervin's doctor is Jeffrey Krivit, MD, an ear, nose and throat doctor with Physicians' Clinic of Iowa, P.C. He started performing balloon sinuplasty a little over a year ago.

“A company developed a technique in 2004 to open the sinuses in a less invasive fashion than endoscopic sinus surgery,” said Dr. Krivit. “During the procedure I place a guide wire through the natural drainage pathway, then place a balloon over that guide wire and blow the balloon up with pressurized saline. This opens the nasal passage in such a way that doesn't cause scar tissue.”

Patient results

A study of 1,036 individuals at several hospitals reported sinus symptoms improved in 96 percent of patients at an average follow-up period of 10 months. Another study followed 65 individuals and reported significant improvement in patient symptoms up to two years after surgery.

“The data has been compelling in that patients reported an ability to breathe better, the complication rate is low and it's very well tolerated by patients,” said Dr. Krivit. “This is a major advancement for some aspects of this disease but it's certainly not designed for every sinusitis patient.”

For most patients a hybrid surgery using both endoscopic and balloon sinuplasty may be the best course of treatment.

“It's extremely individualized,” said Dr. Krivit. “It's like any chronic disease, there is not a 'one size fits all' approach. It's unique to each patient; depending on the status of the disease, the medical and surgical treatment is tailored to each patient.”

Patient recovery

The procedure takes about an hour. Recovery for balloon sinuplasty is minimal with some patients reporting feeling better a couple of days following the

procedure. The complete benefits may not be noticed for six-to-eight weeks.

“I am glad I went ahead with the balloon sinuplasty,” said Ervin. “I think I will always have some sinusitis issues but I definitely feel a difference after this procedure, particularly with fewer secondary sinus infections.”

“We always try to be our patients' best advocate and work to figure out a way to do something in a better fashion,” said Dr. Krivit. “This is a helpful procedure for some patients. I don't think it's a 'be-all end-all' procedure. It's an additional tool to surgically treat sinusitis. People need to know it's not just surgical treatment that cures people of sinusitis – it may require surgery and on-going medical treatment.”

“I am far easier to get along with since this procedure,” said Ervin. “When you have a sinus inflammation or infection, it can make you grouchy. I'd say I'm less grouchy now. I tried not to let my chronic sinusitis get in the way of living my life but I would say everything life has to offer is much more enjoyable now that I'm not dealing with a sinus problem as frequently.”

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