We have become a nation of “drippy noses,” and “stuffy” heads, with rising statistics on asthma and allergies. Dr. Ivker, a family practice physician, says chronic sinusitis, along with its companion candidiasis, is now America’s most common “incurable” chronic ailment. What is causing this epidemic of sinus disease? A combination of air pollution and overuse of antibiotics, causing weakened immune systems and yeast overgrowth – candidiasis, says Dr. Ivker. After specializing in treating these patients for a decade, he developed a “Sinus Survival Program,” based on his clinical success using complementary or alternative (CAM) therapies.

The sinuses, along with the nose, as the upper part of the respiratory tract, serve as the body’s chief protector of the lungs. An infection (now believed to be a fungal or mold infection) in the nose may lead to other chronic upper respiratory problems. Cigarette smoking is a major factor for some, inflaming the mucous membrane causing swelling and damage to the cilia. Many ENTs have routinely prescribed antibiotics for sinus infections and those patients often develop chronic sinusitis, resistant to all medications. Surgery, too, has often resulted in failure to cure sinusitis.

In Part 1 of Sinus Survival Dr. Ivker describes the “sick sinus” and other related respiratory diseases, and the conventional treatments. In Part 2 he presents the case for holistic medicine (Dr. Ivker is president of the American Holistic Medical Association) and his protocol is called The Sinus Survival Program, using environmental “hygiene,” diet, vitamins, herbs, supplements and antioxidants. One of the most informative sections deals with outdoor exercise and air quality. When you exercise, you may increase your intake of air by as much as ten times your level at rest. The combination of fresh air and sunshine holds many health benefits but if you are suffering from any of the respiratory diseases, Dr. Ivker suggests indoor exercise during high pollen times and the rise and fall of pollution levels.

Sinus Survival includes a “Natural Quick-Fix Symptom Treatment” chart giving non-drug remedies for symptoms such as sore throat (“gargle with lemon juice and honey, lozenges, zinc picolinate 30mg 3x/day”) and stuffy nose (“adequate water intake, hot tea with lemon, steam, massage, no cold drinks, no dairy”). The components of the Sinus Survival Program is presented in detailed charts, divided into Preventive Maintenance and Treating an Infection, with dosages of supplements given for adults, children, and pregnant women.

There is an extensive chapter on Candida. This fungus or yeast organism, is a normal inhabitant of the human body and only becomes a problem when the good bacteria in the gut is destroyed by antibiotics, either given as medicine or ingested in meat. When that imbalance occurs an overgrowth of Candida results, and can spread to the sinuses as well as other parts of the body. Dr. Ivker has found the two – sinusitis and candidiasis – are often involved together. Many other factors besides antibiotics can tip the balance in favor of yeast, including birth control pills, other drugs, sugar and alcohol, and environmental chemicals.

There is a section at the end of Sinus Survival on mental, emotional, and spiritual health which consists of a hodgepodge of affirmations, NLP (neurolinguistic programming), meditation, dreams, journaling, and “learning to love yourself.” The mental and spiritual are often addressed in holistic medicine, however too many bits and pieces of different modalities is confusing in this otherwise very helpful book.

Robert Ivker, DO has written an essential self-help guide for those suffering from sinusitis, and related respiratory illness. These “winter ills” are best treated with natural remedies as drugs and surgery have not been effective. Dr. Ivker’s expertise in CAM therapies is evident throughout his book and should be a resource for both patients and doctors.