

How To Tell The Difference Between the Common Cold and the “Dreaded” Flu

It is that time of year when we start to see a lot of coughing, sneezing, stuffy noses, sore throats, headaches...the list goes on! With so many symptoms, how is one to differentiate between the common cold and the “dreaded” flu? They both are respiratory illnesses, but different types of viruses cause them. Cold symptoms are usually less severe and develop over a few days. Flu symptoms usually come on quickly and are more pronounced. We have provided a quick reference chart to help you determine if what you are experiencing is just a cold or if it’s the flu.

Symptoms	Cold	Flu
Fever	Rare	Usually present
Aches	Slight	Your entire body may feel sick
Chills	Uncommon	Fairly common
Tiredness	Mild	Moderate to severe
Sudden symptoms	Gradually	Within 3-6 hours
Coughing	Hacking, productive	Dry, unproductive
Sneezing	Common	Uncommon
Stuffy nose	Common	Uncommon
Sore throat	Common	Uncommon
Chest discomfort	Mild	Moderate- if turns severe, seek medical attention immediately
Headache	Uncommon	Common

Colds generally last about a week, but they can be persistent and may linger a little longer. Here are some tried and true remedies that might make you feel better while you have your cold:

- Drink water and plenty of fluids. Fluids can help loosen congestion and prevent you from getting dehydrated and feeling worse. It is important to avoid caffeinated sodas, alcohol and coffee, as these can make dehydration worse.
- Salt water. It has been reported that gargling with salt water-1/2 teaspoon salt in an 8 – ounce glass of WARM water-can temporarily soothe a sore throat.
- Saline nasal sprays. Over-the-counter saline nasal spray may help relieve nasal stuffiness and congestion.
- Over-the-counter cold medications. While over-the-counter cold medicines can provide some symptom relief, they do not make the cold disappear and do come with some side effects. Acetaminophen (Tylenol) if taken in high doses, can cause serious liver damage. It is important to get in the habit and always check the ingredients listed on any medication to make sure that you are not doubling-up on any ingredient. For instance, many cold medicines contain Acetaminophen as one of their many ingredients. You would not want to take a does of cold medicine that already has Acetaminophen in it

followed by another dose of plain Acetaminophen, as it increases your risk of overdosing.

- Humidity. Colds seem to be more common in the winter because of the dry conditions. Using a humidifier can add moisture to the air, which can help keep the mucous membranes moist and possibly avoid stuffy nose and scratchy throat.

Here is a list of remedies that do not work to get rid of a cold:

- Antibiotics. Antibiotics do not help fight cold viruses, rather they destroy bacteria, and sometimes it is the healthy bacteria that our body needs to help protect itself. When you use antibiotics inappropriately, you risk the chance of becoming antibiotic resistant.
- Antihistamines. While antihistamines do help with runny noses and sneezing with allergies, they are not as useful with symptoms of the common cold. Rather, they can dry up nasal membranes more and inhibit the flow of mucus.
- Decrease food intake. Do not starve your cold! There is no research that states not eating will rid your cold symptoms any faster.

So, how does one avoid getting the common cold or the dreaded flu?

We have included some suggestions that may help you stay clear of catching a cold, flu or other communicable diseases:

- The best way to avoid the flu: get annual flu shot to protect yourself!!
- Use good judgment and avoid close contact with people who are ill.
- Remember to use good coughing techniques-cough into the bend of your elbow, not your hands (that touch everything and spread germs).
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Avoid touching your mouth, eyes, or nose areas with your hands.
- Lastly, live a healthy lifestyle that includes: get plenty of sleep, eat a healthy diet, drink plenty of fluids, engage in physical activity and manage your stress.

Sincerely,

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