

Dear Doctor:

Your questions answered by Marnie Boyer PA-C

How do I know if my symptoms are allergies or a cold?

Allergies or a cold? It's a common problem we are familiar with. One day you notice your throat feels a bit scratchy and your nose is stuffy. Great the annual spring cold has arrived.... Or has it?

It can be difficult to tell the difference between a cold and allergies. Many of the symptoms overlap.

Let's review the causes and common symptoms of both.

Cold: Colds are caused by a virus. There are hundreds of viruses responsible for the common cold. These viruses are usually spread by coughing or sneezing. They cause an immune response that cause the ache, fever, tiredness, congestion and cough. After 10-14 days your immune system has gotten rid of the virus and your symptoms go away.

Allergies: Allergies are caused when your immune system responds to a harmless substance that it mistakes as a germ. Unlike a cold, your symptoms are present as long as you are exposed to the allergen.

Unlike a cold, allergies are not contagious. Symptom onset is immediate with exposure to the allergen. You can sometimes have a cough and feel

tired but allergies never cause a fever. Treatment of colds and allergies is to aim at symptom relief. There are no cures for either colds or allergies. Antihistamine/decongestants help relieve nasal congestion and runny nose. Cough suppressants or expectorants for cough. These in combination with rest and plenty of fluids is all most people need. The important thing to remember is antibiotics do not work for colds or allergies. Antibiotics work on bacterial infections. These types of infections, called secondary infections, occur many days after the onset of a cold or prolonged allergy symptoms. Your health care provider can determine if you have a secondary infection and prescribe the appropriate treatment for you. Your local pharmacist is a valuable member of the health care team and can assist you with questions regarding which is the best over the counter medication for you to take. You should see your medical provider if your symptoms don't respond to treatment, you develop a fever, or have difficulty breathing.



Marnie Boyer PA-C wants to remind you that washing your hands frequently, coughing and sneezing into your sleeve, can go a long way in prevention. Limit exposure to allergens by vacuuming and dusting frequently.