

# Is it a cold or the flu? Here's how to tell

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(HealthDay)—It's a miserable feeling—you're exhausted, your throat hurts, and you're achy and feverish. But is it a cold or the flu?

According to Cindy Weston, an assistant professor at Texas A&M College of Nursing, the flu and a common cold can have similar symptoms, but with a few distinct differences.

The most common cold symptoms are mild fatigue, fever, cough, [sore throat](#) and head, chest or [nasal congestion](#). Also, a [runny nose](#), sneezing and watery eyes are standard telltale signs, she said.

"The common cold is complicated to treat and can't be cured, but rest and nutrition seem to be the best approach," Weston said in a college news release. "You can take medications to treat the symptoms and make yourself more comfortable."

A cold typically goes away within a week. If you still feel sick after a week, or if your symptoms are severe or you have asthma or other chronic conditions, it might be time to see a [health care provider](#), Weston advised.

"The flu typically comes on quick and strong as opposed to a nagging cold. You may be feeling fine during the morning but can feel horrible, with a fever and aches, in the afternoon," Weston said.

Another difference between the flu and the [common cold](#) is the type of aches and pains.

"Aches and pains are prevalent in both conditions, but with a cold, the aches are mild and generally associated with congestion. The flu can present with deep muscle pains in your large muscles, including your legs and back," Weston said.

If you get the flu, anti-viral medications prescribed within 48 hours of its onset can reduce the intensity of symptoms and reduce the risk of complications, she said.

"Both the flu and cold can lead to further problems like pneumonia, bronchitis or sinusitis. The flu is more likely to do so," Weston noted. "It's best to treat the [symptoms](#) and stay well-rested to lessen the chances of further problems."

**More information:** The American Academy of Family Physicians has more about [colds and the flu](#).

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