

Is it a cold, nasal allergy or allergic asthma?



Importance of knowing your symptoms

“Rhinitis” means inflammation of the nose, which really refers to what happens when your immune system tells your body to produce mucus to fight an enemy when you have a cold.¹ In the case of respiratory or inhaled allergies, the enemy might be something as innocent as dust and pollen. But, for reasons that the medical community has yet to understand, your body senses the dust as being very harmful and responds with the same ferocity as it does to a cold virus.

If you’ve never been diagnosed with allergies, then you might think that itchy feeling in the back of your throat is the beginning of a cold. But, it could be an allergy. These are some things that colds and nasal allergies have in common:

- Some of the symptoms are similar
- Your body’s response to a cold and an allergen is triggered by your immune system
- There is no cure for the common cold or allergies, but both can be managed to help you feel less miserable

You may be able to avoid catching a cold, but you can’t avoid developing allergies. Your immune system attacks a substance that may not be harmful in itself, but that triggers an allergic reaction each time the immune system detects it in your bloodstream.

Allergic asthma

Some percentage of people who have allergies also have allergic asthma. During an asthma attack, your bronchial tubes can swell, which causes your airways to narrow.¹ This makes it difficult to get air into and out of your lungs. You may feel like you can’t catch your breath, which can be extremely frightening. Chronic asthma can become debilitating and dangerous.

Genetic, environmental and occupational factors have been linked to developing asthma. If someone in your immediate family has asthma, you are more likely to have it. “Atopy,” the genetic tendency to develop an allergic disease, can play a big part in developing allergic asthma. However, not all asthma is allergic asthma. Being exposed to things in the environment, like mold or dampness, dust mites and secondhand tobacco smoke, have been linked to developing asthma. Air pollution and viral lung infection may also lead to asthma. Occupational asthma occurs when someone who never had asthma develops it because they are exposed to something at work.²

It’s important to work with your healthcare provider to diagnose allergic asthma, so you can get the proper medication.



Sources:

1. Cleveland Clinic. Allergic Rhinitis, July 2020. Available from www.clevelandclinic.org.
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Learn How to Control Asthma, July 1, 2021. Available from www.cdc.gov.

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