

Is it a cold, nasal allergy, or allergic asthma?



“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.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.

Some percentage of people who have allergies also have allergic asthma. In fact, the World Health Organization (WHO) says that the strongest risk factors for developing asthma are a combination of genetics and exposure to inhaled substances that cause allergic reactions.²

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. According to WHO estimates, there were 417,918 deaths due to asthma in 2016. Asthma afflicts people in all countries, regardless of level of development.

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

¹ Cleveland Clinic, “Allergic Rhinitis,” accessed at www.clevelandclinic.org, last reviewed July 30, 2020

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