



Asthma, Allergies, or Cold: What's the Difference?

Asthma is a lung disease that makes your airways tighten up. It makes it hard to breathe. Asthma causes you to wheeze, feel short of breath, feel chest tightness, and cough.



More than 20 million American children and adults have asthma.

What Happens With Asthma?

Airways are the parts of the body that move air into your lungs and out of your body. With asthma, breathing is harder because your airways get narrow and tight. Asthma can be set off by infections, allergies, exercise, temperature changes, or other triggers like dust, smoke, or pet hair.

With asthma you can have:

- Wheezing
- Shortness of breath
- Coughing with or without mucus
- Coughing with or without exercise
- Coughing in cold air or smoke-filled room
- Missed days at work or school

What Happens With Allergies?

Allergies are when you are very sensitive to certain things. The allergy can make the person ill.

You could have an allergy to:

Pollen	Medicine
Dust mites	Food
Animals	Smoke
Mold	



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With **allergies**, you can have these symptoms:

- Sneezing
- Runny and itchy nose
- Red, watery, and itchy eyes
- Swelling
- Coughing
- Wheezing
- Rashes

What Happens With a Cold?

A cold is an infection. Colds cause sneezing, stuffy nose, body aches, and fever.

What's the Difference?

The main difference between allergies and a cold is *how long* symptoms last. A cold usually lasts 5-14 days. Allergies last longer. Allergies may even be year-long.

What to do:

Allergies	Asthma	Cold
Avoid triggers	Avoid triggers	Rest
Allergy shots (see doctor)	Asthma medicine	Drink fluids
Medicine		Medicine

There is no cure for allergies, asthma, or the common cold. You can help control these by:

- Learning what is happening in your body – see your doctor
- Avoiding what makes your symptoms worse
- Following your asthma or allergy plan
- Taking your asthma, allergy, or cold medicine as your doctor orders

Get control and stay healthy.

References

The Asthma & Allergy Foundation of America. Available at: <http://www.aafa.org>
National Heart Lung and Blood Institute. Available at:
http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/dci/Diseases/Asthma/Asthma_WhatIs.html