What is the difference between colds and the flu?

Q: How can I tell the difference between a cold and the flu? Are they treated differently? What can I do to make sure my family and I don’t get either the cold or the flu this season?

A: It is not possible to tell the difference between a cold and the flu when you first become ill.

**Symptoms**

A cold can be caused by a variety of different viruses. The usual symptoms are:

- Nasal congestion
- Runny nose
- Sometimes a sore throat, cough, sinus pain, or fever.

Usual symptoms of the flu include:

- Fever
- Headache
- Muscle pain
- Nasal congestion
- Sore throat
- Cough
- Fatigue

Flu symptoms tend to become more severe than cold symptoms. People who have the flu tend to have higher fevers than those who have colds. Physicians' offices sometimes have rapid detection kits for the flu. There are no rapid detection kits for a cold.

**Treatments**

Colds and flu are both treated with rest, plenty of fluids and a pain and fever reliever. Antiviral medications available for the flu can decrease the time that people have symptoms but as much as one day.

Most people just wait out the illness until they recover. The main issue with influenza is that it can make you extremely ill. If this happens, you need to seek medical care. As always, drink plenty of fluids and take medication to relieve pain and fever.

**Avoiding cold and flu**

There is no way to make 100-percent sure that you and your family will not get a cold or the flu this season other than isolating yourselves from all contact with others.

But you can greatly reduce your chances of getting flu this season if you and your family get flu shots. Others ways you can probably reduce your chances of getting the flu or a cold this season include washing your hands after coming in contact with others and before eating, staying away from people who are coughing, and coughing and sneezing into your elbow instead of into your hand or into the air.
What is the difference between colds and the flu? - Health and Fitness - cleveland.com - ... Page 2 of 2