Cold won't go away [1]

Dear Alice,

I have been under quite a bit of stress lately and cannot seem to shake a cough and swollen gland. Every time I start to feel better, it starts all over again. Also, I hate to admit this, but I smoke. Do you think the stress has anything to do with the long period of time I seem to have had this "cold"? It's been going on about two months.

Answer

Dear Reader,

The common cold usually lasts one to two weeks so your multi-month cough fest may be the sign of something more. Because your cold has lasted for so long, you may unknowingly be fighting off a secondary infection like sinusitis, bronchitis, walking pneumonia, strep throat, or something else. You may also be experiencing "consecutive colds" which seem like one long cold. Whatever the cause, the sheer duration of your cold plus any of the following signs, including swollen glands like you mentioned, are good reasons to pay a visit to a health care provider to get checked out:

- Fever over 103ºF
- Painful sinus pressure
- Colored phlegm when you cough
- Chills or sweats

List adapted from the Mayo Clinic [2].

Smoking may weaken the lungs' ability to fight off infection, and as a result, smokers may experience chronic cough and colds of longer duration or increased severity. Stress and any resulting lack of sleep, exercise, or healthy eating may also affect your body's ability to defend itself. Stress-reduction therapies, such as aerobic exercise, meditation, yoga, and tai-chi, could help boost your energy levels and immune response. Regular exercise and rest may also be of some benefit. Check out the related Q&As for specifics and additional ideas. This may also be a convenient time to consider kicking your smoking habit [3].

Other ways you might be able to fend off future illnesses include:

- Get vaccinated! Many pharmacies and health clinics offer flu shots when fall and winter roll around, so check around to find the closest shot spot.
• **Wash your hands regularly** [4]. Hot water + soap suds = bye bye germs.
• **Eat your fruits and veggies.** Laying off the chips and cookies and replacing them with more nutritious foods may bolster your immune system to fight off whatever germs may get past the hand-washing and vaccination.
• **Stay active.** Even with a busy schedule, try to find time to get your heart rate up and your blood pumping. Exercise has been shown to boost the body’s defense mechanisms.

With these tips and perhaps a quick trip to your health care provider, hopefully your cough fest will come to a close.

Alice!
Category:
General Health [5]
Colds & Flu [6]

Related questions

Do I have a cold or the flu? [7]
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Resources

Medical Services (Morningside) [11]
Medical Services (CUMC) [12]
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