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In the spring when I woke up with a stuffy nose, scratchy throat and headache, I had to ask myself – is it allergies or is it COVID? Now in the fall, when I have those same symptoms again, I need to throw in cold and flu into that mix! It is not always easy to make the distinction but it is helpful to know some key characteristics of each so you can at least decide if it is time to see your doctor.

The first step is to separate allergies from the other three which are viral infections. An easy symptom that helps you do that is fever. You do not get a fever with allergies. So if you have a fever in addition to other respiratory symptoms, it is an infection and not allergies. If you have body aches with your runny nose and scratchy throat, then again seasonal allergies are less likely, and a viral infection is more likely the culprit.

Nasal allergies generally cause sneezing, runny nose, itchy eyes, scratchy throat, nasal congestion and sometimes a cough from the nasal drainage. All these symptoms may be present with a cold, but you're more likely to have other symptoms like fatigue, low grade fever and malaise as well. The symptoms start off relatively mild and progress over a few days in the case of a cold. Allergies frequently make you feel irritated and frustrated rather than making you want to stay in bed with a cup of soup and a warm blanket.