

drag on for 12 weeks or more and can include a runny nose, coughing, headaches and pressure or tenderness in the face. A

doctor can help pinpoint the problem's source. If bacteria is indeed the issue, you may be able to eradicate it with the help of antibiotics; a nasal polyp can be dealt with through surgery.

Another possible explanation for an overly lengthy cold:

you caught a new bug just as the older one was clearing up. There are more than 200 constantly mutating

viruses that can cause colds, so it's almost impossible to become immune to them all. To protect yourself, make a

concentrated effort to wash your hands frequently. If you can remember, don't touch your eyes, mouth or nose, since these are three of the main places where the culprit viruses enter the body.

Finally, try to keep your cool: experimental studies suggest that stress makes people more susceptible to colds and other infections. **R**

Don't use decongestant nasal spray for more than

three days

in a row. After that, you risk aggravating a stuffy nose or making it last longer, a phenomenon known as rebound congestion.



How to shake stubborn symptoms

A Cold Is a Cold Is a Cold. Or Is It?

BY SAMANTHA RIDEOUT

THE COMMON COLD isn't usually serious, but it's still a pain, particularly when you can't seem to beat the bug. There may not be much you can do to make it go away sooner, but zinc-acetate lozenges (80 to 100 milligrams of elemental zinc per day for up to two weeks) and vitamin C (up to eight grams per day until you recover) are each worth a try, according to Dr. Harri Hemilä of the University of Helsinki's Department of Public Health. This is because they're low-cost, low-risk interventions that boast at least some evidence of shortening

a cold's duration, if you take them when symptoms first appear. "However, don't buy zinc lozenges that contain citric acid, since that binds zinc ions and may block their benefits," Hemilä says.

In adults with normal immune systems, the common cold typically lasts around seven days. If you've had symptoms for weeks on end, it's worth visiting a GP to make sure another problem isn't to blame. For instance, you may actually have bronchitis or chronic sinusitis, or be suffering from an allergy. Sinusitis— inflammation of the sinuses—can



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