What's the difference between a cold and the flu?

Colds and the flu are both caused by viruses and can be easily passed between people through coughs and sneezes, or by physical contact. Colds tend to be accompanied by a runny and blocked nose, sneezing, tiredness, headaches, mild fever, coughing, and a sore throat. These symptoms are usually at their worst for the first two-to-three days and then start to ease off.

The flu is much more severe than a cold and is characterized by fever, sweating, a dry/chesty cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, sneezing, headaches, aching muscles, and severe fatigue, making it hard to get out of bed. The symptoms usually peak after two-to-three days but can last for two-to-three weeks.

How to tell if you really have the flu:

- The phone’s ringing on the other side of the room, but getting out of bed to answer it is just too exhausting.
- Your head is saying you spent the night out on the town, when the furthest you travelled was to the bathroom and back.
- Your body aches from head to toe and you feel as though you’ve been used as a human punching bag.
- Your home is hotter than a Barbados beach but you’re wearing four layers and still can’t stop shivering.

For more information on all these subjects and more, visit myCIGNA.com, select the My Health tab, and browse the Healthwise online medical encyclopedia.