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## explainity explained: The Flu

Clara has a runny nose and feels rotten. It's obvious – she's ill.

But does she have the flu or just a cold?

She visits her GP. He explains the difference between a 'cold' – also called a 'common cold' – and 'flu'.

The symptoms are similar in both cases: coughing, runny nose, headaches and aching limbs. With flu, though, the symptoms usually occur after just a few hours and are often more severe and persistent. Colds frequently take a few days for a scratchy throat, light sniffing or a cough to develop into a full-blown illness.

But the main difference is the pathogen. 'Common' colds can be caused by hundreds of different pathogens – most of them viruses.

In contrast to the flu, only one specific family of viruses is responsible. They are known as influenza viruses. There are three types within this family. Influenza A, B and C.

Type C is usually quite harmless to people, and type B is comparable to a common cold. Type A is the most dangerous, especially for the elderly, people with chronic diseases, expectant mothers and children. For them it can be a serious danger, as their immune systems tend to be weaker than other people's. They may end up contracting other diseases as well. Organic or muscular inflammations then frequently become life threatening.

What is so special about influenza viruses? They keep changing. This means that the body is unable to produce suitable defence mechanisms like it can for cold viruses.

Pesky viruses are everywhere: on door handles, on the underground or on keyboards. They can even be transmitted via the air or by physical contact.

They pass from the mucous membranes of the nose, airways and eyes, and move from there to the body's cells, where they propagate and destroy the healthy cells. The more the viruses spread, the worse the illness will be.

So remember: take preventative action!

The most important things are to wash your hands regularly, keep your distance from sick people and strengthen your own immune system. A daily dose of vitamin C, zinc and plenty of liquids can help here. Warm clothing and exercise out in the fresh air are also good for your body. Air the room regularly and avoid stress.

Flu viruses are tenacious, but Clara can go to her GP each year – the best time is between October and November – to get a jab. But this inoculation still does not guarantee 100 percent protection. There is no vaccination against a 'common' cold, because there are just too many pathogens.

And Clara? She really does have the flu. But whether it's the flu or a cold, the remedy is the same: settle down in your warm bed and rest.

Your GP can also prescribe some medication if necessary. Usually, though, household remedies like leg compresses or a hot soup can help as well.

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All that's left is to say "Get well soon" to Clara.