



Understanding Environmental Mold Exposure, Indoor Mold and Foods Rich in Mold

What is Mold?

Mold is a microscopic fungus that grows and lives on plant or animal matter or on nonorganic objects. Most molds are made up of filaments and reproduce through the production of spores. These spores spread by air, water, or insects. There are many thousands of species of fungi.

Common indoor molds include:

- **Alternaria**
- **Aspergillus**
- **Cladosporium**
- **Mucor**
- **Penicillium**
- **Stachybotrys chartarum**

Molds are found everywhere in the environment, both indoors and outdoors, and throughout the year.

What Are Common Reactions to Mold?

Molds cause allergic symptoms in many people. Common reactions include:

- Nasal stuffiness
- Eye irritation
- Wheezing when breathing

More severe reactions may occur in workers, such as farmers, who are exposed to large amounts of molds in occupational settings. These reactions include fever or shortness of breath. Mold infections may occur in the lungs of people with obstructive lung disease. Individuals with weakened immune systems are especially susceptible to infections from many different types of mold or fungi.

Foods Rich in Fungal (Mold) Protein-Allergens

Certain foods may contain mold or mold-derived allergens, potentially causing reactions in sensitive individuals. Common examples include:

- **Cheeses:** Blue cheese, Brie, Camembert, Gorgonzola
- **Fermented Foods:** Soy sauce, miso, tempeh, sauerkraut
- **Alcoholic Beverages:** Beer, wine, sake
- **Dried Fruits:** Raisins, figs, apricots, prunes
- **Nuts:** Walnuts, peanuts, pistachios
- **Processed Meats:** Salami, sausages
- **Baked Goods:** Bread and other baked items if moldy
- **Vinegars:** Apple cider vinegar, balsamic vinegar
- **Mushrooms**

How Can Mold Exposure Be Decreased?

Outside: Avoid areas likely to have mold, such as:

- Compost piles
- Cut grass
- Wooded areas
- Damp, mossy areas
- Greenhouses
- Saunas
- Antique shops

Inside:

- Keep humidity levels between 40% and 60%.
- Ventilate showers and cooking areas with exhaust fans.
- Use an air conditioner or a dehumidifier during humid months.
- Avoid using carpet in susceptible areas, such as bathrooms or basements.
- Dispose of or thoroughly dry and clean objects, such as carpets or upholstery, that accidentally become wet.
- Fix leaks in roofs, walls, and plumbing to eliminate moisture.
- Add a mold inhibitor to paint when painting.
- Use mold-killing products to clean bathrooms.

Mold and Water Damage

According to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), mold is one of the most serious results of water damage from a hurricane or severe floods. Mold can grow within 24 to 48 hours after water damage and continue until proper measures are applied to stop it. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) states molds can be recognized by sight, such as wall or ceiling discoloration, and by a bad odor or musty smell.

FEMA and CDC warn that returning to water-damaged homes after a disaster may pose serious health threats. This is especially true for people with preexisting respiratory conditions, pregnant women, children, the elderly, and individuals with compromised immune systems. Always wear rubber gloves, goggles, and boots when cleaning areas with mold.

FEMA and CDC have developed specific guidelines for cleanup of water-related disasters. Please consult with your healthcare provider for any questions or concerns regarding this condition.