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**MOLD: A HIDDEN ALLERGEN**

\* There are basically 2 types of mold: **healthy molds** found in food or medication (mushrooms, cheese, yogurt, wines and antibiotics) and **unhealthy environmental molds**. **Environmental molds can cause allergic symptoms.**

\* **Molds are fungi, living substances** that feed off both indoor and outdoor surfaces. Fungal spores grow fast: their job is to keep the planet clean of decaying matter. **Mold needs moisture, darkness and warmth to grow.** It can feed on many surfaces including rotting soil, animal waste or dead leaves. Molds can grow on wallpaper, drywall, paint, carpets, wood, fabrics, adhesives, paper and the biofilm that covers tile or plastics. Mildew is a visible sign of mold spores in damp, dark places (bathrooms, under sinks, in laundry areas, basements, or behind walls if there are leaks). These environmental molds trigger allergy symptoms.

\* Mold spores grow fast but they're also microscopic in size: if you see mildew that means mold infestation is heavy. Mildew can be black, brown, yellow or white and usually has a musty smell. Some molds are so harmful they cause not only respiratory or skin problems but are even cancer-causing agents.

\* **Environmental mold can cause allergy symptoms such as** nasal and sinus congestion, a dry hacking cough, wheezing, difficulty breathing, a sore throat, shortness of breath, fatigue, burning, watery and/or reddened eyes or blurry vision, skin irritations, headaches or even mood change. **Mold** is one of the most **common and serious triggers** for those who have **allergic asthma**, causing asthma symptoms that result in asthma flares or exacerbations.

\* **The best way to avoid a mold allergy reaction is to eliminate the mold and source** of the mold. Since mold is a living substance it must be killed or it will continue to grow and spread.

\* **Look for clues that mold could become a problem** in your home: condensation on windows, cracking plasterboard or wallboard, loosening drywall tape and warped wood or boards; musty odors or mildew growing on bathroom surfaces.

\* To help **reduce mold growth**, keep indoor humidity between 20-40% in the winter and less than 60% in the summer. If you live in a humid climate it may be necessary to invest in a dehumidifier to draw mold-causing moisture out of the air. (It will also make the room cooler). If you purchase a dehumidifier, check consumer product comparison sites to see which is the most effective for your situation. Don't forget to empty the machine as soon as the water hits the full level and, most importantly, follow the manufacturer's cleaning instructions and change filters as directed. Allow the sun into your house, too, since **sun naturally kills molds**.

\* Other ways to **prevent bad molds or mildew from growing** include using exhaust fans in bathrooms and kitchens, cleaning up water spills, repairing leaks, raking up old vegetation, throwing away piles of old papers, books, etc. and airing out summer homes or motor homes and trailers if they're not used regularly before you take the next family vacation. If you store fabric lawn furniture cushions over winter, be certain they're completely dry before you put them away and air them in the sun before the next use. Best is to wash them and sun-dry completely if possible.

\* If your house does smell "earthy" or musty, or if you see mildew, first **eliminate the mold source**, which is **always moisture**. **Find the leak causing the problem then repair it.** Next, test for color-fastness and **clean** all exposed washable surfaces thoroughly with an **ammonia-free** soap solution and hot water then **sanitize** with a diluted bleach solution – 9 parts water to 1 part bleach which kills mold (**NEVER mix ammonia and bleach** - the fumes are toxic; always ventilate the area when working with bleach). Bag and **discard** any **items** that have mold and **can't be cleaned** such as paper, rags, leaves, debris or non-washable fabrics. If you have a mold allergy, wear a mask, eye protective gear and disposable gloves to clean up mold, or better yet, ask someone else to do this task for you.

\* If you've had mold under carpets, after you fix the leak that caused the mold and killed the mold on the floor surface with bleach, a non-toxic solution without an offensive "perfume" smell can help take **strong mildew odor** out of the carpet. Mix 1 cup dry borax powder (found in the detergent aisle) with 2 cups of cornmeal. Sprinkle the carpet with this mixture, let stand for an hour, then vacuum. Always color test fabrics before trying any cleaning method.

\* Some researchers suggest that placing small pots of English Ivy plants in your home will help eliminate mildew. The ivy filters mold spores from the air reducing mold allergens in the room. For more information, contact [info@aafatexas.org](mailto:info@aafatexas.org)

**Upcoming AAFA-TX programs:** 1) **Applications and qualifications** for the AAFA-TX Kareem Bacchus Scholarships, 2009-2010 are available on our website [www.aafatexas.org](http://www.aafatexas.org). Completed applications must be returned to AAFA-TX before March 15, 2010. Details online. The 3 winning recipients will be notified by June 1, 2010 2) **Current through July 2012** Do you have mild to severe asthma? Do you have asthma symptoms at least once a week even though you're following your medication therapy? Are you between 18 and 65 years of age? If so, you may want to participate in a biofeedback breathing technique study funded by the NIH and taking place now through July 2012 at Baylor University Medical Center and Southern Methodist University in Dallas. No medications will be changed during the 4 week long study. The objective is to learn better breathing technique to alleviate or prevent symptoms. For more info and to enroll in this free study, call 214-768-3414. Stress, Anxiety and Chronic Disease Research Center, Southern Methodist University, Expressway Tower, 6116 N. Central Expressway, Dallas, 75206 3) **Jan. 15, 2010** "Asthma Management & Education" a continuing education program for nurses, respiratory therapists and educators worth 3 CEU. Little Rock, AK. Instructor Jeanette Arnold, MSN, CFNP, AE-C 4) **Jan. 18, 2010** "Asthma Management & Education" a continuing education program for nurses, respiratory therapists and educators worth 3 CEU. Amarillo, TX. Instructor: Don Cui, PA-C, AE-C. Pre-registration required. 5) **Feb. 15, 2010** "Asthma Management & Education" a continuing education program for nurses, respiratory therapists and educators worth 3 CEU. Houston, TX. Instructor: Gwen Carlton, MSN, CS, FNP, AE-C, PhD. Pre-registration required. Questions? Contact [info@aafatexas.org](mailto:info@aafatexas.org)

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