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Mold Hypersensitivity: Guidelines to Help Sufferers to Stay Safe

In recent years, there has been increased societal recognition of the ability of certain substances (such as peanuts, gluten or latex) to cause extremely negative effects in certain individuals in even trace amounts.

Although exposures to large amounts of these substances have little or no effect on most people, even very tiny amounts of exposure can be incredibly harmful to a small percentage of the population.

Working together to protect these individuals from harm and to help them to engage in lives that are as normal as possible in the context of their disability can be extremely helpful to them.

One rapidly growing type of hypersensitivity is to certain kinds of toxins made by environmental molds such as those that frequently grow in buildings.

Hypersensitive individuals who are exposed to even infinitesimally small amounts of these particular toxins can suffer a wide variety of negative effects – anything from passing out to memory loss to shaking to skin burns to seizures. Many other less severe symptoms also are common.

On the other hand, hypersensitive individuals who are able to successfully avoid exposures to these toxins have the potential of living normal and productive lives.

These basic guidelines are designed to give family, friends, employers, colleagues, teachers, school administrators and others some basic information about how they can help people with these kinds of hypersensitivities to stay more well by avoiding problematic mold toxins.



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Why do people become hypersensitive to these mold toxins?

Most people who are hypersensitive to mold toxins previously have spent considerable amounts of time living, working or going to school in a building with a hidden but particularly problematic toxic mold issue. Genetics are also thought to play a role.

How much exposure to these mold toxins is required to trigger a response?

This can vary but often the amount is very small. For instance, it is not at all uncommon for an object such as a book to be contaminated with enough toxin to be able to cause people with this type of hypersensitivity to become very ill. People or pets can have enough toxin sticking to their hair or clothing to cause severe reactions in hypersensitive individuals as well.

If mold is not growing on an item, does that mean that it is safe for a hypersensitive person?

No. What usually happens is that hidden mold colonies release dormant toxic spores into the air. These dormant spores disintegrate into dust particles, which then may contaminate everything in the whole environment. Therefore, items can become contaminated with mold toxins even if mold itself has never grown on them.



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How do people who are hypersensitive to mold toxins know when they are being exposed?

Many hypersensitive people have learned what their warning signs are to these toxins and thus are fairly effectively able to evaluate whether an environment or an object is safe or unsafe for them. This does take some practice, however.

What kinds of things do hypersensitive people need to do in order to remain safe?

Hypersensitive people need to be especially careful to prevent problematic mold toxins from getting into their own homes. They often take a shower and change clothes as soon as they come home so that cross-contamination does not occur. They need to be careful to make sure that new possessions are not contaminated. They must stay out of problematic buildings and sometimes avoid certain outdoor locations as well.

Can hypersensitive people have guests in their homes?

Yes, provided that the guests do not bring problematic mold toxins into the environment as a result of those toxins being stuck to their clothes, hair or possessions. Many friends or family members of hypersensitive people agree to shower and put on different clothing elsewhere or when first entering the home, in order to make sure that their visit will not end up causing a negative effect.



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Can hypersensitive people visit my home?

Maybe. The best way to find out is for them to give it a try – with the understanding that they may have to cut the visit short if the home causes them to react in a negative way.

How can I spend time with hypersensitive people?

Many times it works out well for hypersensitive people to spend time with family or friends outdoors or in public places like restaurants that they have found to be okay for them. It's also important to know that foregoing hugs may be necessary since this can transfer problematic mold toxin from one person to another. Handshakes tend to be a much less problematic form of physical contact.

Can hypersensitive children go to school?

Unfortunately, a high percentage of schools have substantial toxic mold problems and may not be tolerated by hypersensitive children. Cross-contamination with mold toxins from elsewhere also may be a problem. Nonetheless, many children who have become hypersensitive to mold toxins do succeed in attending regular schools. Others are home schooled.

Can I travel in the same car with a hypersensitive person?

Vehicles can easily become contaminated with mold toxins, and so hypersensitive people may not be able to ride in other people's cars and may be especially protective about their own cars. Even though it may seem to be a waste of fuel, sometimes driving separately to places is a good idea.



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What should I do if my spouse or a family member has become hypersensitive to certain mold toxins?

Some care on your part can make things much easier for the hypersensitive person to live a more normal life. For instance, routinely showering and changing clothing when returning home can prevent toxins from being brought into the environment. In some cases, staying out of certain particularly problematic buildings entirely might be a good idea. On the other hand, your willingness to run errands into problematic buildings also might be appreciated in some cases.

Do people who are hypersensitive to mold toxins tend to be hypersensitive to certain other environmental substances as well?

Often they are. For instance, some laundry detergents (which may use fungal enzymes) can be a problem. In addition, many people who are hypersensitive to mold toxins also have problems with artificial fragrances or certain other laboratory-made chemicals. Air fresheners, scented candles, perfumes, dryer sheets, Febreze and other heavily scented chemical products can trigger severe health effects in some mold-sensitized people, for example.

What else can I do to help people who are hypersensitive to mold toxins?

Mold hypersensitivity is a difficult condition to manage effectively. Your sympathy and emotional support may be much appreciated.



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Should I worry about the impact of mold toxins on my own health?

Although exposure to mold toxins is not a good thing for anybody, people who are healthy can tolerate vastly larger amounts than hypersensitive people can. Therefore, just because hypersensitive individuals cannot visit your home (or cannot let you visit their home without showering) is not in itself cause for alarm.

How can I know if my home, workplace or school has enough of a mold problem that it could be a danger to healthy people?

The best and easiest way is through a test called the ERMI, which was developed by the Environmental Protection Agency. It is a collect-it-yourself test that uses genetic analysis to determine whether species of mold capable of making dangerous toxins are present in your home. The cost is about \$300.

Here is a page of information about the ERMI test:

<http://www.momsaware.org/mold-testing/83-ermi-mold-testing.html>

How can I learn more information about mold hypersensitivity?

A basic book for those with this problem is *A Beginner's Guide to Mold Avoidance*. It is a fast read and is available for free.

www.paradigmchange.me/avoidance/



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Additional information and links to other resources on the topic of mold hypersensitivity may be found throughout the Paradigm Change website.

Visit the Paradigm Change website:

www.paradigmchange.me