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Mold affects everyone, regardless of age, ethnicity, or overall health and fitness level. Surprisingly, you are as much at risk for mold in dry climates as wet climates. The mold growing in desert regions can be even more tenacious, since it's had to adapt to the drier air.

It turns out that 25 to 28 percent of people are genetic "canaries in the coal mine" for experiencing severe mold reactions — and in the US that amounts to about 75 million canaries.

Anyone can have problems from a water-damaged building, but if you're mold-sensitive, it's more likely that exposure can trigger a debilitating illness. Symptoms are wide ranging, from autoimmune and inflammatory issues to neurocognitive problems.

People have experienced fatigue, migraines, muscle cramps, numbness and tingling, cardiac arrhythmias, and insomnia. The list of symptoms is almost endless because the toxins can settle into so many parts of your body.

Weight gain is very common. A few experience "unexplained" weight loss, but most have rapid unexplained weight gain that doesn't stop until they receive proper treatment.

There are numerous mental and neurological effects associated with mold toxicity, including brain fog, cognitive dysfunction, and mood disturbances. It's not uncommon for people to have short-term and long-term memory loss, confusion, depression, and panic attacks. Children can experience drops in IQ.

Brain imaging reveals that mycotoxins can actually damage your brain — in particular, your amygdala. This can result in experiencing mood swings or rage for no apparent reason. Those with mold toxicity often describe their emotions as "out of control." According to mycotoxin expert Dr. Harriet Ammann, indoor molds can damage the systems of your body in the following ways:³

Vascular: blood vessel fragility, hemorrhage from tissues or lungs

Digestive: diarrhea, vomiting, hemorrhage, liver damage, fibrosis, and necrosis

Respiratory: trouble breathing, bleeding from lungs, and sinus infections	Neurological: tremors, loss of coordination, headaches, depression and anxiety, and multiple sclerosis
Skin: rashes, burning, sloughing, and photosensitivity	Urinary: kidney toxicity
Reproductive: infertility, changes in reproductive cycles	Immune: Immunosuppression

Mold Illness Is Real

The good news is, once you realize you've been poisoned by toxic mold, with proper support your brain and body can recover. But in order to do so, it's important to find a "mold literate" physician to guide you in every aspect of your care. Recovering from mold-induced illness requires an integrative approach under the guidance of a knowledgeable healthcare practitioner. Most primary care practitioners aren't trained to treat mold poisoning and don't even take a mold history. Unexplained symptoms are usually dismissed or attributed to other problems, such as psychological issues.

Those who DO believe in mold toxicity typically limit their approach to the prescribing of steroids and dangerous antifungal medications, many of which are toxic to your liver. Recovering from mold toxicity requires removing the source or sources of exposure, then starving the fungi out of your body with an [antifungal diet](#) and avoiding foods that may be contaminated with mold. Make sure your vitamin D levels are optimized, as vitamin D has been shown to be effective against mold allergies.

Top 10 Foods to Avoid If You Have Mold Sensitivity

People with environmental mold sensitivities are typically sensitive to mold in food as well. Along with a menagerie of chemicals, pollutants, and pathogens, mold further adds to your body's toxic burden and can overwhelm your detoxification and immune systems. Even miniscule exposures can trigger major reactions once you're sensitized — as well as triggering a relapse once you've recovered.

So, it's important that you take steps to make your environment as mold-free as humanly possible, including your foods. Some foods are more susceptible to mold

contamination than others. Below are the top 10 mycotoxic foods, as outlined in the book *Mold: The War Within* by Kurt and Lee Ann Billings. As you can see, many of top offenders are grains. For more on the Billings' recovery plan, refer to our prior article covering [natural treatments for mold toxicity](#).

1. Alcoholic beverages: Alcohol is the mycotoxin of <i>Saccharomyces</i> yeast (brewer's yeast), and often contains other mycotoxins from mold-containing fruits and grains	2. Wheat and all wheat products
3. Rye	4. Peanuts: Often contaminated with dozens of mold types, one of which is cancer-causing aflatoxin
5. Cottonseed and cottonseed oil	6. Corn: Universally contaminated with a variety of fungal toxins
7. Barley	8. Sorghum: Used in a variety of grain products and alcoholic beverages
9. Sugar from sugar cane and sugar beets	10. Hard cheeses

What's Involved in Mold Remediation?

Whether you stay in a contaminated house or leave, remediation will be necessary, and I would suggest hiring a professional mold remediator. In the case of flooding, step number one is to pump out any standing water and remove all personal belongings, which also need to be carefully cleaned and dried if you're going to try to salvage them. As stated earlier, it's optimal to discard all personal belongings and start over, if possible. Standard mold remediation involves the following steps:

1. Setting up containments and sucking the air out with negative air pressure.	2. Next, they clear the air using a HEPA filtered air purifier or scrubber. The air
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(This is similar to turning on your bathroom vent fan.)	must be cleaned because once they start working on the mold, the spores will begin to fly everywhere like light dust.
3. Wearing protective gear, such as HEPA filtered respirators, goggles, protective suits, and latex gloves, the remediator begins taking the affected area apart. Removed parts, such as drywall, are slowly and carefully placed into a bag.	4. Once the affected pieces are bagged, every inch of the area is carefully HEPA vacuumed again.
5. Once the source of the mold has been located, it's carefully removed using hot soapy water, scrub brush, HEPA filtered sanders, chisels, or any other tool that will remove the mold.	6. Professional remediators will typically treat the area with a disinfectant, as bacteria accompany mold growth.
7. Next, the area is force dried. Once thoroughly dry, repairs can be made.	

How to Choose a Professional Remediator

Take great care in hiring a mold remediator and make sure he or she is certified. You will find contractor or professional listings on the following websites. Both the IICRC and NORMI are certifying organizations for mold remediation, but the IICRC certification may be the most widely used. Keep in mind that a mere certification may not be enough — also evaluate the remediator's qualifications and insurance (liability as well as workers' compensation). With the ACAC, there are a few different levels.

- [IICRC](#) (Institute of Inspection, Cleaning and Restoration Certification)
- [ACAC](#) (American Council for Accredited Certification)—a certifying body that is third-party accredited.
- [The IAQA](#) (Indoor Air Quality Association)—a membership organization with no certification program (the ACAC handles this by agreement)
- [RIA](#) (Restoration Industry Association)
- [NORMI](#) (National Organization of Remediators and Mold Inspectors)

Improving Your Indoor Air Quality

According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), poor indoor air quality is one of the top five greatest environmental risks to public health. Amazing as it sounds, indoor air can be five to 10 times more polluted than outdoor air. This is due to inadequate ventilation, so contaminants build up and stagnant air is re-circulated. Long-term exposure to air pollution particulates has been associated with faster cognitive decline in older adults.

One of the best things you can do to improve your air quality is add a high-quality air purifier. My recommendations for air purifiers have evolved over the years, along with changing technologies and newly emerging research. At present, after much careful review and study, I believe air purifiers using Photo Catalytic Oxidation (PCO) seem to offer the best technology available. For more tips on improving your air quality, please refer to our earlier article.

More from Leading Mold Experts...

I've interviewed several experts on mold-related illness over the past few years, and five of those are linked below. The most recent was natural health author and actress Suzanne Somers whose latest book, *TOX-SICK: From Toxic to Not Sick*, includes information about recovering from mold toxicity.

Suzanne and her husband both suffered from mycotoxin exposure. For Suzanne, toxic black mold settled in her intestines, which led to a misdiagnosis of cancer. For her husband, the mold caused symptoms akin to Parkinson's disease. Suzanne is a strong advocate for reducing your body's toxic load, advising her readers, "*Stop counting your calories and start counting your chemicals!*" Sound advice indeed!

- Suzanne Somers on healing from [toxic overload](#)
- Dr. Ritchie Shoemaker on strategies for identifying and [healing from mold exposure](#)
- Jack Thrasher on the "[hidden](#)" mold pandemic
- Dr. Doris Rapp on [mold-related health risks and remediation](#)
- [Dr. Jim Pearson](#) also about mold-related health risks and remediation