The Pollen

Issue N°15 - Molds

Molds are organisms that exists both indoors and outdoors. They break down and digest dead plant or animal matter, such as leaves, wood, paper, dirt, and food. Mold grows in moist dark spaces, such as basements, air ducts, your garbage can, rotting wood and leaf piles and on foods, such as bread, cheeses or that forgotten container of 'something' in the back of your refrigerator. Molds exist in two stages; a growth stage and a reproduction stage. Their growth stage consists of gathering energy from a food source. In their reproduction stage, they use their energy to release tiny, lightweight spores into the air.

During reproduction, molds release their spores in enormous amounts of up to 30 billion per day. Due to their microscopic size, they can remain suspended in air for days and travel on the wind for thousands of miles. With that many spores floating along such a vast distance, avoiding mold is all but impossible. We frequently breathe in mold spores and eat foods in which mold has begun to grow with no bad effects. However, people with mold allergies may not tolerate this exposure as well and experience symptoms when exposed to mold.

The typical symptoms of a mold allergy such as wheezing, cough, stuffy or runny nose, itchy, watery eyes, rash or hives are also common with many other allergy symptoms. If you tend to have all or some of these symptoms year round you may benefit from allergy testing. Since mold is a virtually unavoidable allergen given its many habitats, immunotherapy can be the only definitive treatment to help improve or eliminate allergy symptoms and the need to take medications to relieve them.

Did you know?

There are over 60,000 different species of molds, and two of the most allergenic molds that you encounter, *Aspergillus* and *Penicillium*, both derive their names from unique places. *Aspergillus* is named after the religious tool used to sprinkle holy water, an aspergillum, while *Penicillium* is the Latin translation for paintbrush, which it also resembles.

1. Middleton's Allergy. Seventh Edition. 2009.
2. Tom Volk, University of Wisconsin – La Crosse