

Mould and Pollens Avoidance

Tree, Shrub & Grass Pollen Avoidance

Allergy to pollen is extremely common. All plants produce pollen, which is in effect male sperm, very high in protein and hence allergenic. Female flowers of plants are fertilised either by wind borne or insect borne pollen. It is windborne pollen that is the major problem, as the air is filled with minute particles when the male flowers are open.

Allergen avoidance is difficult for pollen allergy as the tiny pollen spores are windborne and travel for miles on air currents. However the following measures can be helpful:

- Stay indoors wherever possible when the count is high (generally on warmer, dry days). Rain washes pollen from the air so counts should be lower on cooler, wet days
- Limit outdoor trips to rural areas. Sea breezes blow pollen inland, so escape to the sea instead.
- If you go out, shower and wash your hair on return, and change your clothing before coming back into the living room or bedroom.
- Keep windows closed when indoors and overnight whilst you are sleeping. This is most important in the early mornings, when pollen is being released, and in the evening when the air cools and pollens that have been carried up into the air begin to fall to ground level again.
- If you suffer symptoms indoors, a good air filter should help. Choose one that is proven to trap even small particles.
- Avoid mowing lawns or raking leaves. If you must perform these tasks, use a face mask.
- Wear wraparound sunglasses when outdoors to keep allergens out of your eyes.
- Avoid line-drying clothes and bedding when pollen counts are high.
- Pollen counts tend to be high along roads with grass verges (highways). Keep car windows closed and the air intake on 'recirculate' when driving. Choose a car that is fitted with an effective pollen filter, or get an in-car air filter.
- Apply Vaseline around the edge of each nostril. Gel nasal sprays are sometimes helpful; they act as a barrier to trap pollens.
- Choose hypo-allergenic eye make-up, especially mascara.
- Don't let pets get close to your face as they can carry pollen in their fur.
- Use goggles when swimming, whether in the sea or in a pool.
- Try replacing lawns with gravel or paving, ornaments and water features!

Mould Allergy Advice

Of the four main inhaled allergens, house dust mite debris, animal allergens, plant pollens and mould spores, the last is the most difficult to understand and cope with. All of them float in the air, to be taken in with every breath, to settle on the eyes and in the nose as well as the lungs to produce all the well known symptoms, runny nose, itchy puffy eyes and difficult breathing.

Moulds spores are prolific everywhere. They include the black mould that forms on window frames and others that are found on decaying food; also mushrooms and fungi that grow wild. Exposure to mould is widespread so it is difficult to determine how much mould an individual is exposed to in everyday life. Like dust allergens, mould allergies are perennial and allergic people exhibit symptoms throughout the year, although levels rise in the autumn, during wet, mild weather and harvesting.

Moulds release spores and it is these spores that cause the allergic reactions in people. Spores are microscopic particles released by moulds in their thousands into the atmosphere. Spores contact skin and nasal and bronchial membranes, causing symptoms such as rhinitis, itchy eyes, eczema and most importantly asthma. Several well-known conditions, such as Farmer's lung and Sauna-taker's lung, are caused by mould allergy.

Moulds favour damp musty conditions; therefore piles of rotting leaves, grass cuttings, compost heaps, and garden sheds are prime environments for mould growth. Indoor moulds can be found on food that is going off, such as the black and white fur that is found on cheese, bread, fruit and vegetables.

The refrigerator is a key mould environment if not adequately cleaned and dried, particularly around the seal. Other types of mould can be found on window frames, especially when there is a lot of condensation on the windows, under wallpaper and on the soil of houseplants. Likewise, the damp environment caused by tumble dryers and baths and showers makes the kitchen and bathroom danger zones.

The greatest source of spores in the garden is from turning over a compost heap and spreading its contents. If it has to be done then, either do it during rain which washes the spores into the ground, wear a face mask or better still, ask someone else to do it!

How to avoid moulds

Moulds are prevalent throughout our environment. Most people associate mould with damp walls and similar extreme situations. The fact of the matter is that we are all exposed to moulds, to

varying extents in our everyday activities. The following measures will help minimise contact with moulds.

Avoiding indoor moulds.

- Moulds flourish in damp environments, therefore one of the best ways to prevent their growth is VENTILATION.
- Thorough cleaning of the kitchen, bathroom and utility room with subsequent ventilation of these areas will help prevent mould growth.
- Open windows and close internal kitchen and bathroom doors when cooking, showering or bathing to prevent steam entering other rooms. Keep bathroom surfaces dry. Do not hang wet clothes inside or over radiators.
- Do not let food decay and clean and thoroughly dry problem areas such as refrigerator seals.
- Clean mould from window frames and dry condensation.
- Do not hang clothes in damp cupboards or pack clothes too tightly in wardrobes.
- Leave wardrobe doors ajar to ventilate the clothes
- Do not spend time in damp attics, cellars or sheds.
- Get rid of old foam pillows and mattresses.
- Do not bring in damp wood for the fire. Avoid burning wood inside that has been kept in a damp shed.
- Strip wallpaper from damp walls.
- Remove piles of old newspapers.
- Keep houseplants to a minimum and change the soil regularly
- Do not use humidifiers.
- If using a dehumidifier, empty, clean and dry the water reservoir daily
- Avoid paraffin heaters.
- **Avoiding moulds outdoors**
- Do not spend time in buildings where hay or grain is stored.
- Do not go into damp and musty buildings.
- Avoid cutting grass, raking leaves and turning compost heaps.
- Do not walk in the woods in mild damp conditions or among rotting leaves.
- Avoid country areas when harvesting, particularly when sunny and windy.

- **Protective measures.**
- Allergy bedding covers protect you from mould spores within the mattress, pillows and duvets.
- Filter facemasks, like those worn by cyclists, trap spores
- Mechanical ventilation systems can remove spores.