

Healthy Living

The dangers of mold infestation

Whether it's a fuzzy patch on a basement wall or a dark speckle on bathroom grout, mold might be dismissed as a minor nuisance. But a mold infestation is a serious health hazard and a threat to a home's structural integrity. When mold spores find moisture and a food source, they can multiply rapidly, quietly compromising both a living space and residents' well-being.

The most pressing danger of mold is its impact on personal health. Mold releases tiny spores and volatile organic compounds into the air. When inhaled, these particles can trigger respiratory issues, particularly in sensitive individuals, according to the Cleveland Clinic. People with asthma, allergies or compromised immune systems are at the greatest risk of mold-related illness. Exposure often leads to a cluster of symptoms, which include chronic coughing, wheezing, nasal congestion,

skin irritation, and red, itchy eyes. More concerning is exposure to toxic molds, such as *stachybotrys chartarum* (commonly known as black mold). These strains produce mycotoxins — toxic substances that can cause more severe neurological issues, chronic fatigue, headaches, and respiratory bleeding in extreme cases, according to WebMD. Because these spores are invisible, inhabitants often suffer from unexplained illnesses for months before identifying the root cause.

Mold also poses a severe threat to homes and other structures. Mold feeds on organic materials like wood, drywall, carpet, and ceiling tiles. As the fungi grow, they secrete enzymes that digest these materials, gradually weakening them. Over time, an unchecked mold problem can rot structural support beams, ruin insulation, and cause drywall to crumble. By the time mold becomes

visible on the surface, it has likely already caused extensive hidden damage inside the walls.

Preventing and addressing mold requires vigilance. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says mold

thrives in environments with relative humidity above 60 percent. Therefore, controlling indoor moisture is a very important preventive measure. Fixing leaky pipes immediately, using exhaust fans in kitchens and bathrooms, and running

dehumidifiers in damp basements can keep spores dormant.

If one discovers a mold infestation covering an area larger than 10 square feet, he or she should avoid disturbing it, as this can launch millions of spores into the

air. Instead, homeowners should look into hiring professional remediation services to safely isolate, kill, and remove the mold. Treating mold early protects personal health and can prevent long-term damage to a home.

What to know about perimenopause

Hormones drive many functions in the human body, including the ability to reproduce. For women, estrogen, progesterone and even testosterone play key roles in health and well-being. The levels of these hormones are not static; at different times in the reproductive cycle they wax and wane, resulting in various symptoms. Such is the case at a point in a woman's life when she enters perimenopause.

Women likely know about puberty, pregnancy and the general years of menstruation. They have also likely heard of menopause, or when a woman's menstruation and ability to have children ceases. Nestled in between is a period of time called perimenopause, which is a series of years when women experience a vast array of symptoms that are not always fully understood or recognized.

What is perimenopause?

The U.S. Office on Women's Health says perimenopause is the

natural transitional phase before menopause. During this time, the ovaries gradually begin to make less estrogen and progesterone. This phase can begin in a person's 40s (or even earlier), and may last anywhere from four to 10 years. It ends with menopause, which is when a woman has gone 12 consecutive months without a period.

What are symptoms of perimenopause?

During perimenopause, a woman may notice changes in the body. Some are subtle and others more obvious. The Mayo Clinic lists these as possible symptoms, but there may be many others.

- Irregular periods: As ovulation becomes more unpredictable, the length of periods, time between periods, flow, and other factors can change.
- Hot flashes (flushes): Many women have hot flashes during perimenopause. Hot flashes vary in strength, length and frequency.
- Sleep issues:

Changes in sleep patterns can occur, and are sometimes accompanied by night sweats.

- Mood changes: Mood swings, irritability and increased risk of anxiety or depression can happen during perimenopause.

- Vaginal and bladder problems: Estrogen protects the vagina, urethra and other tissues. So when it decreases, tissue can become drier and less elastic. Pain during intercourse can occur, and dryness can cause burning when urinating, even if an infection is not present. Lack of estrogen also can cause a woman to get more urinary or vaginal infections.

- Changes in sexual desire: During perimenopause, some women may enjoy sex less, while others may enjoy it more.

- Loss of bone: As hormone levels decrease, bone loss occurs more quickly than it can be replaced.

- Changes in digestion: Some women experience changes in the foods they can tolerate, bowel habits and other factors.

- Changes in cholesterol levels: Less estrogen can cause an increase in LDL cholesterol and a decrease in HDL, putting women at greater risk for heart disease.

Can tests detect perimenopause?

Most health providers use age and symptoms as diagnostic tools for detecting perimenopause. Hormone levels fluctuate so much that tests often are not reliable, according to the Cleveland Clinic. But certain hormone tests can indicate if you're in perimenopause. Testing the FSH (follicle-stimulating hormone) level can often determine if perimenopause is beginning. A consistently high level of FSH, which is a hormone the pituitary gland produces to stimulate the ovaries to release an egg during ovulation, indicates one is getting near menopause.

Women may choose to ride out perimenopause without much assistance, while others prefer talking to their doctors about different treatment options designed to address symptoms. Medications, lifestyle changes and hormone therapies can be options.

Practice a healthy skin regimen

The skin is the largest organ of the human body. Despite that, people tend to take skin health for granted. From unprotected time spent in the sun to a failure to address dryness or irritation, skipping skin care can be a mistake.

Globally, skin and subcutaneous diseases affect approximately 25.7 percent of the population, according to the American Academy of Dermatology. It's important to support the skin barrier from the inside out through various steps. Here is how to target skin health and make it a priority.

- Wear sunscreen. People should apply

a broad-spectrum SPF 30 or higher product every morning, even on cloudy days.

- Stay out of the sun. Avoid tanning beds and prolonged, unprotected sun exposure.

- Be gentle. Always use mild, non-abrasive, fragrance-free cleansers, and be gentle when rubbing the skin.

- Use warm water. Wash the face and body using warm, but not hot, water to protect the integrity of natural moisture in the skin.

- Moisturize. After bathing or washing, apply moisturizer to skin while it is still damp to lock in hydration.

- Hydrate. Drink plenty of water throughout the day to support skin elasticity and barrier function.

- Minimize consumption of processed foods. Processed foods high in refined sugars can cause internal inflammation and trigger breakouts, says Rush University Medical Center.

- Eat nutrient-rich foods. Prioritize foods that are rich in antioxidants like berries and leafy greens, healthy fats, and vitamins.

- Manage stress. The Mayo Clinic says high stress levels can increase cortisol, which can trigger acne and

aggravate skin conditions like rosacea, psoriasis and eczema.

- Quit smoking. Smoking can prematurely age the skin by damaging elasticity and collagen. It also restricts blood vessels and prematurely ages complexion, according to the University of Michigan Health-West.

- See a dermatologist. Book a full-body skin exam and skin cancer screening at least once a year to check for any health conditions like changing moles.

It is essential to be mindful of skin health and take steps to protect the skin each day.



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