

Sniffling, sneezing & allergies: help for snowmelt season

By T. Lee Brown
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Sniffles and sneezes, coughs and headaches. Do you have a cold — or is your body reacting to the environment?

Snow mold, which grows and blooms during snowmelt, can ratchet up allergies. (See story, page 3.)

Experts don't always agree on how to handle mold illness and allergy. Still, a few sensible suggestions can go a long way.

Chemical Warfare

Julie Rehmeyer is an expert on mold-related health issues. Author of the intriguing, thoughtful memoir "Through the Shadowlands: A Science Writer's Odyssey into an Illness Science Doesn't Understand" (Rodale, 2017), Rehmeyer suffers from severe mold sensitivity.

Mold exposure can paralyze her in seconds flat.

She offered tips for *Nugget* readers to keep outdoor molds out of the home. "Shower and change your clothes as soon as you get home," she said.

This applies to everyone in the household.

"Leave shoes outside. These molds can easily spread from your clothes or hair onto your bedding, furniture, etc., so getting rid of them right away makes a huge difference.

"I learned these methods from a guy named Erik Johnson, who applied the techniques he'd learned in the Army for dealing with chemical warfare!"

Safe Room

Rather than protecting their entire house, some folks create a sleep sanctuary — one safe room, cleaned frequently with a sealed HEPA™ vacuum such as a Miele. No one enters with pollen or mold on their clothes or hair.

To Rake Or Not To Rake?

"We should not be touching it with our bare hands, for sure," said Lilly Byrtus of snow mold on Canadian news. Byrtus is a regional coordinator of the Allergy Asthma Information Association.

If snow is piled up around your yard, allergy expert Dr. Stephanie Fox recommends spreading it around with a shovel or rake so it will melt faster.

Byrtus has a different take. "It's kind of a Catch-22, whether it's better to rake it and spread it out, or let it run its course," she said. "If we rake it, it becomes airborne. That [raking] should certainly not be done by the person that is sensitive to mold.

"Usually we say just leave it alone," Byrtus concluded.

Shuttered & Filtered

Rising humidity encourages mold spores to proliferate,

Dr. Purvi Parikh of Allergy and Asthma Associates in New York told CNBC.

Dry winter air discourages molds from "blooming." When the air grows warm and moist — such as when snow melts — molds come back to life.

That's when they're most likely to send spores, hyphae fragments, and other allergens into the air. It's tempting to open a window when we see the sun out, but that can invite humidity and spores inside.

"For indoor mold issues, effective air purifiers like HEPA can help remove mold spores from the air," said Parikh.

Not all HEPA systems are created equal. BlueAir and Austin are reliable brands; use with brand-name replacement filters.

Rehmeyer notes that when outdoor air is bad, indoor air may be even worse.

"Off-gassing of materials, cooking, breathing, etc., can quickly make your indoor air as bad as Beijing," she said. "Ordinarily, opening windows is a good solution — but if there's mold in the outdoor air, that won't work."

Rehmeyer is partial to PCO technology for filtering mold.

"Particular brands that are well-regarded are Vornado and Molekule," she said. "Whole-house filtration is also an option — heat recovery ventilators filter outdoor air, allowing for plenty of fresh air while not admitting outdoor molds."

Wash With Care

Laundry duties can get intense when someone in the household develops allergies. Whether pollen or outdoor mold is the culprit, clothes and hats require frequent cleaning.

"Be careful about your washing machine," Rehmeyer urged. "Modern washers easily develop mold problems, so run them on their self-clean cycle frequently to avoid this. Clean the gasket with vinegar and baking soda — and enjoy the volcanic bubbles!"

See A Professional

Parikh noted that because of climate change, more people are experiencing more allergies. Treatment and research are changing, too.

"If your allergies get really bad," she said, "There are appropriate medications people can take to alleviate the symptoms."

While popping a Benadryl may help some people with short-term reactions, others need a deeper approach. Prescription medications like leukocyte inhibitors may be required. Allergy clinics offer testing, treatment, and patient education.

Sinus pain and stuffiness may subside after strain-counterstrain techniques, like those

performed by Marlene Dumas at Green Ridge Physical Therapy. Some allergy sufferers also find relief with



PHOTO BY TL BROWN

Keep your boots outside to avoid spreading mold spores indoors. Or try setting up a "safe room."

acupuncture.

Patients may develop allergies and sensitivities in tandem with fatigue, migraine, mood, or neurological issues.

For them, a holistic approach may be worthwhile. Oregon has a wealth of well-educated naturopathic doctors and functional medicine

practitioners, such as Kim Hapke, N.D. of Sisters and Dr. Eric Mallory of Pure Health Natural Medicine in Bend.

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