

Mold Allergy

By Heidi Hawkins, MAc, LAc

Mold Allergy Is Common

Living in the Pacific Northwest, I find mold allergy quite common. In my experience, virtually every person who lives in this damp climate is allergic to mold to some degree.

Environmental mold is rarely the cause of mold allergy, however; it simply exacerbates the problem. Few people have the ability to recognize allergies before they become severe; therefore, most allergies go undiagnosed. Allergy tests continue to improve, but still leave a lot to be desired.

Peanut Allergy, Mold and Toxins in the Food Chain

Peanut allergy may currently be the most famous of food allergies. There have been numerous cases, especially involving children of severe peanut allergies leading to death. Anyone with severe allergies can confirm that total avoidance of every allergen is nearly impossible. Accidental exposure is virtually inevitable. Fatal allergies are obviously an extreme case; however, we should not dismiss the warning as these allergies are becoming more common.

Peanut allergy is nearly always an allergy to the mold aflatoxin-as the name implies, a toxin from mold. Plenty of natural substances are toxic. From the USDA Web site (<http://snurl.com/36ne>): "Aflatoxin is a naturally occurring mycotoxin produced by two types of mold: *aspergillus flavus* and *aspergillus parasiticus*." Aflatoxin damages the liver, in both Eastern and Western medical terms, and is a potent carcinogen (something known to cause cancer). This mold is found primarily on peanuts, corn, wheat, soy, tree nuts, oil seeds and sorghum. Aflatoxin is sometimes measurable in milk excreted by cows fed with moldy feed.

Providing poor-quality feed to livestock and other food animals is clearly suspect, not just in relation to food allergies, but also in the spread of disease. It is not unheard of to mix chicken excrement into cattle feed to save money. Blood and bone meal from rendering plants have been used to address imbalances in nutrition from poor-quality feed. This practice makes cannibals of livestock, keeping disease pathogens in the food chain for the sake of increased profit, and contributes to dairy allergies and mad cow disease, as well as increased amounts of toxins in milk.

A number of traditions hold that certain foods are to be avoided because they are "impure." What is considered impure varies among different cultures and religious traditions. One tradition that several cultures mention is the avoidance of pork. When one considers that pigs are scavengers and eat most anything, this prohibition makes sense. Muslim, Jewish, and some Native American traditions prohibit eating pork. The Bible mentions shellfish as impure, and TCM dietary theory classifies shellfish as "*fa wu*."

Fa wu means essentially a toxic food. Peanuts are traditionally included in this category. Shellfish tend to be particularly susceptible to the toxins on the bottom of a body of water and tend to absorb pollution such as mercury. All "bottom-feeders" could easily be classified as *fa wu*. To take this concept into modernity, any food animal that is fed excrement or products that come from a rendering plant should be considered *fa wu*. Such practices make artificial scavengers of pastoral animals. To take the concept to the next step, any food that contains chemicals, including pesticides, could be classified as *fa wu*. In this sense, only natural and organically grown food is safe to eat. With the argument about classification of what constitutes "natural" and "organic," and lacking stringent regulation and enforcement of pure food standards, even foods labeled as natural or organic may be suspect. We live in a challenging modern world. Knowledge is the key to surviving it, as well as the possibility of thriving in this world as it is.

The Bible refers to toxic food, particularly in *Leviticus*. This chapter also contains stringent recommendations about purification in general, and about mold in particular. Contained therein are strict instructions for destroying moldy houses. If we followed those instructions today, there would hardly be a house left standing in Bellingham, where I live! However, it is worth contemplating these recommendations and their underlying implications. Mold has also been interpreted as one of the "10 plagues" mentioned in the Bible.

In addition to peanut and dairy allergies, other food allergies linked to mold include: wheat and other grains, berries, melons, citrus, and moldy cheeses, such as blue cheese. These foods tend to either have high level of

molds on them under normal circumstances, or have a tendency to be eaten despite the mold. Mold exposure through diet is an infrequent cause of mold allergies, however. Once again, the exposure aggravates a pre-existing, usually undiagnosed allergy.

Mold Allergy and Antibiotic Use

Many people have had allergic reactions to antibiotics. Antibiotic reactions are one of the most common allergies known. What few consider is that antibiotics, originally derived from mold, are very similar to mold in their fundamental nature. According to the principles of TCM, mold and antibiotics are both very cold and damp. Therefore, there is a fundamental relationship between mold allergy and antibiotic allergies. A person with one of these allergies is almost certain to have both of these allergies, whether or not they register on allergy tests. Antibiotic use and abuse are the predominant causes of mold allergy. This is not to suggest that no one should use antibiotics, but that we should be aware of the potential consequences of doing so. We need to make educated choices about using toxic medications, and consider the many alternatives, including acupuncture. Mold allergy is an extremely common, but vastly ignored side-effect of antibiotics.

Toxicity and Allergy

People who truly understand allergies know that there is a direct relationship between toxicity and allergy. A toxic load that overwhelms the body typically becomes an allergy. We all live with stress, and we all know that stress can make us sick or make pre-existing conditions much worse. One of the most significant stresses we all endure is toxicity in our environment.

Allergy is a *logical* response of the body to a toxic situation. The message to reduce or avoid toxins makes sense, and this is the message allergies try to communicate. Pollution in our environment affects us all. Allergies are a way to understand this concept not as a vague generalization, but in a very *specific*, detailed, individual way. Your allergies show you what toxins you have been overexposed to, if you know how to interpret the language allergies speak. Toxins that cause allergies can be natural or not, but usually are not - mold allergy demonstrates this principle.

If you understand now that allergies are a response to toxicity, whether natural or "better living through chemistry," then the folly of treating allergies with toxic pharmaceutical medications should be obvious even to people with no scientific or medical background. All pharmaceutical medications are toxic by

definition. Natural substances cannot be patented, and fortunes cannot be made without a patent. Pharmaceutical medications are toxic *by design*. Allergy to medications is bound to become an ever-increasingly serious problem. Creating new drugs does not curb this problem; it only prolongs the problem.

Getting off medications can be quite tricky, and it must be done slowly and carefully, with help from your prescribing physician. Of course, it is unwise to discontinue medications without implementing an alternative plan for treating the original condition. Please do not attempt to discontinue medication without professional help!

The Practice of TCM and Allergy

Practitioners of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) and other natural medicines, take heed. Our chances of helping people usually only come when mainstream medicine fails. It is of utmost importance for practitioners of natural medicine to recognize the opportunity to make a real difference in a person's health, and to contribute to a cleaner environment with cleaner medicine.

Lest we become overconfident about the advantages of natural medicine, it is important to look at ways that natural medicine can easily become a part of the problem. If you prescribe herbs or other supplements to people with allergies, beware. Most people are allergic to some degree to the plastic bottles that contain supplements, especially if patients show any indication of hormonal or liver imbalances. Pesticide allergy is one of the most severe and common allergies, for the obvious reason of toxicity. Are you sure there are no pesticides in any of the supplements or herbs you prescribe? What about fungicides, other pollutants, natural toxins, or mold? Do you know how old those herbs are, or if they contain rancid oils?

A difficulty of practicing TCM in the West arises when herbs are shipped from countries with different standards regarding toxicity and lax laws for the use of chemicals. As *organically grown* is becoming increasingly popular in the U.S., overpackaging and toxic farming practices seem to be more common in the Third World. If you inadvertently poison your newfound client, or cause a severe allergic reaction in that client, you may have missed an opportunity to help someone who desperately needs natural medicine.

How do you know if your client is allergic to the herbs you are prescribing? It is risky to give herbs to someone with numerous food allergies, to chemically sensitive people, and especially to "universal reactors," people who are essentially allergic to "everything." Be cautious, and learn to test for allergies in

your clients with energetic, noninvasive testing methods. Do not rely on standard medical tests alone for this! Natural medicine practitioners cannot afford to be sloppy or imprecise when it comes to treating allergic clients.

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