

# Sleep and mold

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The [World Health Organization](#) estimates that 10% to 50% of residential homes and commercial buildings have damp conditions. That means up to 50% of buildings worldwide could provide ripe environments for mold to grow and thrive.

Mold can slowly destroy your home and your belongings. If you have a mold allergy, you can expect uncomfortable symptoms like nasal congestion, watery eyes, and more. Plus, it's just plain gross to look at.

Of all the rooms in your home, having mold in your bedroom is one of the most high-risk, simply due to the significant amount of time you spend in there asleep, exposing yourself to mold.

Whether you own or rent your home, it's up to you to protect yourself from mold exposure by preventing mold growth and removing it promptly whenever you find it. Keep reading to learn more about mold, how to prevent and remove it from your bedroom, and how to recognize the symptoms of mold exposure so you can enjoy mold-free sleep.

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## What is mold?

### DEFINITION

**Mold is a type of fungus. It can live outdoors or indoors, any time of year, as long as it has a damp, warm environment. All it needs to thrive is humidity.**

Due to their high levels of moisture, bathrooms and basements are the most likely rooms in a home to harbor mold, but mold can grow anywhere – including your bedroom.

When mold reproduces, it forms spores that travel through the air, enabling mold to spread throughout the area. These spores can survive even when they're in a dry area not conducive to growing mold. Once the area develops moisture, the mold will grow.

There are different kinds of mold, but the ones [you're most likely to encounter at home](#) include cladosporium, penicillium, aspergillus, alternaria, and stachybotrys chartarum.

Molds vary in appearance as well as where you're most likely to find them. For instance, stachybotrys chartarum is colloquially known as “black mold” based on its appearance. You're most likely to spot it on paper or household surfaces that have collected dust or lint, or within the building materials, such as wood, gypsum board, or fiberboard.

## PLACES WHERE MOLD CAN GROW IN YOUR HOME

- Shower stalls
- Bathtubs
- Under sinks or around plumbing
- Drywall
- Carpet
- Wallpaper
- Furniture
- Closets
- Damp clothing
- Any area with high humidity, moisture, or water damage

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In the natural world, mold serves a purpose, facilitating the decomposition of plant life like leaves and compost. When it enters our artificial world through our homes, it poses an issue. Mold exposure can be dangerous for humans and it can damage the areas or objects in your home where it grows.

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## Can you get sick from mold in your house?

Mold itself is not dangerous or toxic, although there are some types of mold that produce toxic [mycotoxins](#), such as black mold. For most people, however, it is the mold allergy or sensitivity that leads to uncomfortable symptoms. Fortunately, these go away once the mold is removed.

It's common for people to be allergic to mold, although reactions vary from mold to mold and person to person. If you have a mold allergy, you will start reacting as soon as you are exposed to the mold. People experiencing an allergic reaction may display any of the following symptoms:

### WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF MOLD EXPOSURE?

Watery, itchy, or red eyes  
Wheezing, sneezing or coughing  
Runny nose  
Skin rash

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In some cases, the symptoms may be more severe. According to the [Institute of Medicine](#), indoor mold exposure has been linked with:

- Upper respiratory tract issues, coughing, and wheezing in otherwise healthy people
- Asthma attacks in people with asthma

- Hypersensitivity pneumonitis in people with compromised [immune systems](#)

A mold allergy can go from uncomfortable to dangerous for people with an already compromised immune system, such as infants and children, the elderly, and those with chronic lung disease, HIV, cancer, or liver disease.

Currently, the CDC acknowledges that indoor mold exposure may be a risk factor for asthma in young children, but more research needs to be conducted for confirmation. Likewise, research is still inconclusive as to a possible link between black mold and acute idiopathic pulmonary hemorrhage among infants and memory loss.

Because reactions can vary, and there's no way to predict your reaction, it's best to avoid mold growth in your bedroom and to treat it as soon as it is found.

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## Signs of mold in your bedroom

Unfortunately, while everyone agrees that mold poses a health risk, there are as yet no governmental guidelines for residential buildings to follow regarding acceptable levels of mold. That means it is up to you, as a homeowner or renter, to know the warning signs of mold growth in your bedroom so you can keep yourself safe.

### WARNING SIGNS OF MOLD IN BEDROOM

You can see visible mold (fuzzy or slick black, grey, white, or brown spots)

A musty odor is present

You and/or your sleeping partner are displaying the allergic symptoms we listed above

Recent [flooding](#) or water damage

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Mold is fairly easy to spot, pun intended. You may notice spots, perhaps with a fuzzy appearance, that have a brown, gray, green or black appearance. There may be a slight musky odor, too.

If you are experiencing allergy symptoms or smell mold, but you can't see it, look for it in harder-to-find areas, such as on or underneath your carpet, floor, or ceiling; inside your walls; around the window sills; on any upholstered furniture or your mattress; or in your air ducts. Since mold can develop in areas you can't see, such as inside your walls or under the carpet, it's important to maintain mold prevention best practices in your home.

### How does mold get in your bedroom?

Mold can develop anywhere that is a moist or humid environment. Depending on the climate where you live, the quality of insulation in your home, and even the location of your bedroom within your home (basement-level bedrooms are most at risk), your bedroom may be more or less likely to develop mold.

Mold spores can also enter from outside your home, through an open window, or by traveling inside on your clothing or your pets.

Mold can also develop on your mattress, due to moisture from your sweat. [Mattresses](#) include soft, porous materials in their construction, such as cotton covers or [foam comfort layers](#). Any of these can absorb moisture and cause your mattress to develop mold.

If you have found mold in one area of your bedroom, do a thorough sweep to ensure it's not anywhere else in your home, as mold can spread easily.

### Is it safe to sleep in a room with mold?

No, it is not safe to sleep in a bedroom with mold. Indoor mold of any exposure is worrisome, but mold in the bedroom is especially so, simply due to the number of hours you spend in your bedroom breathing it in while you sleep.

Beyond the immediate allergy symptoms, mold exposure often cause sleep issues, too.

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## Can mold cause sleep problems?

Several studies have documented a link between mold exposure and sleep problems among different age groups:

- **In otherwise healthy adults:** A [1994 study](#) of over 5,000 adults found that those who lived in damp housing were nearly three times more likely to report sleep problems than those in dry housing. They were also more likely to report poorer [health overall](#), which increased according to the level of dampness in their home. Similarly, a [2005 study](#) of over 16,000 adults found that those who lived in damp homes were significantly more likely to report insomnia.
- **In children:** A [2015 study](#) of over 1,700 children compared the sleep quality of children living in damp bedrooms against those in dry bedrooms. Unsurprisingly, the children of parents who had spotted visible mold in their bedroom, as opposed to just dampness, tended to have a higher risk of sleep problems. These children were more than twice as likely to have difficulty sleeping through the night and to not get enough sleep overall (defined as [9 hours or more for children](#)).
- **In older adults:** A [2015 study](#) examined the effects of the mold odor alone on senior adults. Those who lived in buildings with a musty smell or mildew odor were more likely to have poorer overall health, including asthma attacks, skin rash, chronic bronchitis, sneezing, and sleep problems.

As the studies above make clear, the symptoms associated with mold exposure are not only uncomfortable, but, if the mold is not addressed, they can significantly lower both the quality of your sleep and your overall health.

### Common sleep issues associated with mold

#### MOLD-RELATED SLEEP PROBLEMS

Snoring or sleep apnea  
Insomnia  
Sleep deprivation  
Daytime fatigue

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When you sleep, it is essential for your body to breathe as easily as possible. Otherwise, your brain has to focus harder on keeping you breathing, lowering the quality of your sleep. As a result, people who sleep in bedrooms with mold may suffer from the following sleep problems:

- **[Snoring](#)** refers to any sort of noisy breathing during the night. Snoring may not wake you up, but it can cause insomnia for your sleeping partner, and it is an indication that something is disrupting the quality of your sleep. Snoring can also cause dry mouth.
- **[Sleep apnea](#)** is a serious form of [sleep-disordered breathing](#) where the individual literally stops breathing momentarily during sleep, resulting in a loud gasping or snoring sound while their brain catches their breath. Obstructive sleep apnea occurs from a blockage or narrowing of the airways, as can happen from the nasal congestion associated with mold exposure.

- **[Insomnia](#)** describes a difficulty falling or staying asleep. If you are dealing with wheezing, watery eyes, or a runny nose from mold, you may have trouble falling asleep. Meanwhile, the congestion you experience may make it difficult to stay asleep. Either way, being exposed to mold in your bedroom can result in insomnia, and prevent you from getting a full night of restful sleep.
- **[Sleep deprivation](#)** refers to the physical, mental, and emotional state a person is in when they have missed out on a night of full sleep (defined as [7 hours or more for adults](#)) on a temporary or chronic basis. When we're sleep-deprived, we're moodier, less focused, and at increased risk of [social isolation](#) and health conditions like [diabetes](#), [obesity](#), and [cardiovascular disease](#). Sleep deprivation can also occur if you are ostensibly getting enough sleep, but the sleep is not high-quality, as can be the case when you're snoring or experiencing apneas due to mold exposure.
- **Daytime [fatigue](#)** is one of the most recognizable signs of sleep deprivation. When a person is fatigued, they have lower energy and motivation, and their productivity and emotional well-being suffer.

People with allergies of any kind [report poorer sleep](#) than people without allergies, and the more severe their allergic reaction, the [more their sleep suffers as a result](#). If you are experiencing a mold allergy, you may experience more, or more extreme, instances of these sleep issues.



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## How do I stop mold growing in my bedroom?

The best defense against mold in your bedroom is a preventative defense. Mold spores can survive even in dry environments, so you should focus on preventing moisture from developing in your bedroom in the first place.

Follow these tips to prevent mold in your bedroom. Some of these tips you'll want to follow on a daily basis; others can be done annually or less frequently to maintain your home and prevent mold.

### Daily mold prevention tips

1. Whenever water spills in your bedroom, clean and dry the area immediately.
2. Keep your carpet clean with regular vacuuming and cleaning. Use a HEPA vacuum cleaner to remove spores while you clean.
3. If you live in an area that's prone to humidity, regularly run your air conditioner and ceiling fans, or use a dehumidifier to keep the inside air dry. Ideally, your indoor humidity level should be below 50%. Purchase a hygrometer so you can monitor your indoor humidity levels throughout the day.
4. Keep your bedroom door open to ensure air flow circulation.
5. If your bedroom is connected to a bathroom, open the window or run the exhaust fan for 30 minutes after you shower. Hang your towel afterward to allow it to dry, instead of letting it clump up on the floor or in a hamper in your closet, where mold can grow. Don't store body wash and shampoo bottles in the shower as they can develop mold. Keep your bathroom clean, paying

particular attention to the corners of your shower, under your sink, and the shower curtain.

6. Your bedroom closet can be another danger spot for mold, since many clothes, like outerwear, are not cleaned regularly and can bring in mold spores from the outdoors. Ensure all clothes are fully dry after cleaning them, and do not fold them or put them away until they are. If you store clothes for the winter, ensure they are dry before you seal them in a box with can trap in any moisture.
7. Place bedroom furniture slightly away from the walls, to enable air flow and prevent mold growth. Wipe down all furniture regularly to remove dust.
8. If you have [plants in your bedroom](#), regularly check them for mold, particularly the soil. If you see any gray, there is mold. Scoop out the offending soil and repot the plant with new soil. To avoid mold, add anti-fungal to the soil.

#### Annual mold prevention tips

1. Have your home inspected for water damage or faulty plumbing. Check the walls, windows, and ceilings for mold.
2. Regularly maintain your air vents and clean drip pans to keep air circulating properly.
3. Ensure your windows, roof, and floor are properly insulated and check them regularly. This will minimize condensation as well as prevent mold spores from entering your home.
4. During colder months, keep your house warm to prevent moisture or condensation from forming.

5. If your bedroom is located on a lower floor or in a basement, avoid using carpets. Use area rugs instead that you can regularly clean. Also regularly inspect outdoor areas to ensure water can't enter your home from the outside.
6. If you repaint your bedroom, add mold inhibitor to the paint or purchase anti-mildew paint.

### Mattress-specific tips

Due to body sweat and other moisture, mattresses are one of the top spots mold can grow in your bedroom. Worse, since it's covered with your bedding, you may not realize the mold is there.

Follow these tips to prevent mold growing in your mattress.

1. Use a waterproof [mattress cover](#). This not only prevents your mattress from the moisture of body sweat, but also from stains and other damage, helping you extend the longevity of your mattress.
2. Purchase a hypoallergenic mattress. While any mattress could potentially develop mold, some mattress types are more allergy-resistant than others. [All-latex beds](#) or [organic mattresses](#) are your best options.
3. Clean your mattress regularly. This is one of the best ways you can prevent mold growth, and it's easier than you think. [Read our guide](#) for tips on how to keep your mattress fresh.
4. Finally, try to sleep in a way that minimizes how much you sweat during the night. Some of us are [hot sleepers](#), but many of us also keep our bedrooms hotter than they should be. Set your [bedroom temperature](#) to 60 to 67 degrees Fahrenheit. [Sleep naked](#), or wear pajamas made from

breathable materials. Likewise, invest in breathable [bedding](#), and use multiple layers so you can remove any if it gets too hot.

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## How to remove mold from your bedroom

If you've found mold in your bedroom, take action to remove it immediately. It doesn't matter what type of mold it is; it's all bad. The action you take depends on the scope of the problem.

### In cases of small mold:

- If it's on a **hard** surface, such as your floor or wall, scrub vigorously with a stiff-bristled brush and cleaning product, soap and water, or a mix of 1 cup laundry bleach and 1 gallon of water. (If you use bleach, don't mix it with any other household cleaning products, open your windows and doors, and wear protective gloves and eyewear). Ensure the area dries completely.
- If it's on a **soft** surface, such as your carpet, clothes, mattress, bedding, drywall, or furniture, throw it away.
- Never handle mold with your bare hands, even when cleaning. Always use gloves.

### In cases of large mold (the CDC defines this as an area of 10 square feet or larger):

- Call a mold removal professional. If the mold has spread significantly, these people are experts in identifying all areas that have been infected, and removing the mold entirely from your home. Many offer free in-home consultations, as well.

### If you find mold in your mattress:

- Don't just clean it off. Get rid of it, as per our advice for any soft-surface items with mold in your home. Here's how to safely and responsibly [dispose of an old mattress](#).

After you've removed the mold and cleaned the area, follow the mold prevention tips we outlined above to keep the area as dry as possible moving forward.

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## Additional resources

### Sleep resources from Tuck

- [How To Allergy-Proof Your Bedroom](#): Read more tips for reducing allergens in your bedroom, so you can enjoy more restful sleep.
- [How to Clean a Mattress](#): Learn how to regularly clean your mattress, preventing mold, bed bugs, stains and more.
- [The Best Natural Organic Mattress](#): Mattresses made from organic materials are naturally more mold-resistant. Read this buyer's guide of the best-rated organic mattresses.

### Fact sheets on mold

- The [CDC Fact Sheet on Mold](#) summarizes the latest study findings from the Institute of Medicine and provides mold prevention tips.
- The [2009 WHO Guidelines for Indoor Air Quality: Dampness and Mold](#) were compiled by the World Health Organization, to provide governments, regulatory agencies, and building professionals and homeowners with education on the symptoms of mold exposure and how to prevent mold growth.

### Study findings on mold and sleep

- [“Insomnia is more common among subjects living in damp buildings”](#) and [“Damp housing and adult health”](#) are two large-scale studies which both found a correlation between damp housing and insomnia in adults.
- [“Exposure to visible mould or dampness at home and sleep problems in children”](#) focused on children specifically, finding that children exposed to mold in their bedrooms are also more likely to have sleep problems.
- [“Indoor mildew odour in old housing was associated with adult allergic symptoms, asthma, chronic bronchitis, vision, sleep and self-rated health”](#) found that the presence of a mildew odor in senior housing correlated with poorer health and sleep outcomes.