

THE MOLD LADY

7 Signs Your Home Is Making You Sick

*A research-backed guide to recognizing the hidden symptoms
of toxic mold exposure in your home.*

*"I was told for years it was stress, hormones, or all in my head.
It was my house."*

— **Shemane Nugent, NYT bestselling author of Killer House**

This guide is for educational purposes only and does not constitute medical or legal advice. If you suspect mold exposure, consult a qualified healthcare provider and certified mold inspector. In emergency situations, contact your local health department.

Before We Begin

If you picked up this guide, something doesn't feel right. Maybe you've been tired for months and your doctor can't figure out why. Maybe your kids keep getting sick. Maybe you found something dark behind the bathroom vanity and your stomach dropped.

I've been exactly where you are. In 2012, I was hospitalized for a month. Doctors found four types of toxic mold in my bloodstream. I was diagnosed with pre-emphysema — and I've never smoked a cigarette in my life. Our beautiful Michigan home, the one MTV featured on Cribs, was slowly killing me and my family.

What I learned through that nightmare — and through 20 years of research, recovery, and advocacy since — is that toxic mold is one of the most under-diagnosed, misunderstood, and devastating health threats in American homes. The EPA estimates that **70% of homes have some form of mold**, and the CDC acknowledges that mold exposure can cause serious respiratory illness, neurological symptoms, and immune system damage.

This guide walks you through the 7 most common signs that your home might be making you sick. For each sign, I'll explain what's happening in your body, what to look for in your home, and exactly what to do next. No fluff. No fear-mongering. Just the real information I wish someone had given me before I ended up in the hospital.

HOME	BODY	FAMILY	LEGAL
Is your home safe?	Is your body recovering?	Is your family protected?	Are your rights preserved?

The Mold Lady's 4-Pillar Framework addresses your home, your body, your family, and your legal rights — because no single solution works unless you address all four.

1

You Feel Better When You Leave

This is the single most telling sign of a sick building. Pay attention to this one.

If your symptoms improve when you go to work, travel, or spend time away from home — and return when you come back — your home may be the problem. This pattern is so consistent among mold-affected people that environmental medicine doctors call it the "**location effect.**"

Here's why it happens: when you leave a mold-contaminated environment, your body stops inhaling mycotoxins (the toxic compounds produced by certain molds). Your immune system gets a break. Inflammation starts to decrease. You feel better — sometimes within hours, sometimes within a day or two.

Then you come home. And within hours or days, the fatigue, brain fog, congestion, or headaches return. Many people don't notice this pattern because they assume their symptoms are from stress, aging, or seasonal allergies. But if you consistently feel better away from home, that's a signal your body is trying to send you.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR:

- Track your symptoms for 2 weeks using a simple journal. Note where you were each day and rate your energy, clarity, and breathing on a 1-10 scale.
- Pay attention to vacations. Do you feel dramatically better by day 2 or 3 away from home?
- Ask family members if they experience the same pattern. Mold affects everyone in the household, though some people (especially those with MTHFR gene variants) are more sensitive.

WHAT TO DO RIGHT NOW:

- Start a daily symptom journal today (we have a free template at themoldlady.com)
- Note any improvement during your next trip away from home
- Ask everyone in your household if they've noticed the same pattern
- If the pattern is clear, schedule a professional mold inspection

2

Chronic Fatigue That Won't Resolve

Not normal tiredness. The kind of exhaustion that sleep doesn't fix.

Mycotoxins — the toxic byproducts produced by molds like *Stachybotrys* ("black mold"), *Aspergillus*, and *Penicillium* — trigger a chronic inflammatory response in your body. Your immune system is working overtime, 24/7, trying to fight an invisible enemy. The result is a bone-deep exhaustion that no amount of sleep, coffee, or supplements can fix.

This isn't the kind of tired you feel after a long day. It's the kind where you wake up after 8 hours of sleep and feel like you haven't slept at all. Where you can't make it through an afternoon without lying down. Where your body feels heavy, your motivation disappears, and you start wondering if something is seriously wrong with you.

Here's what makes this especially cruel: **most conventional doctors will not connect your fatigue to mold exposure.** They'll test your thyroid, check for anemia, suggest antidepressants, or tell you it's "just stress." Meanwhile, the root cause — a toxic environment — goes unaddressed. This is exactly what happened to me. I spent years being told my symptoms were hormonal.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR:

- Fatigue lasting more than 3 months that doesn't improve with rest, supplements, or lifestyle changes.
- Fatigue combined with other symptoms on this list (brain fog, respiratory issues, joint pain).
- Fatigue that worsened after moving to a new home, after a water event (flood, leak, burst pipe), or after a rainy season.

WHAT TO DO RIGHT NOW:

- Ask your doctor for a mycotoxin urine panel (tests like RealTime Labs or Great Plains GPL-MycOTOX)
- Request inflammatory markers: C-reactive protein (CRP), TGF-beta 1, MMP-9, MSH
- If your doctor is unfamiliar with mold illness, seek a functional medicine practitioner
- Do NOT accept 'it's just stress' without investigating environmental causes

■ IMPORTANT:

If you've been diagnosed with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS/ME) without your home environment being evaluated, mold should be ruled out. Research published in the journal *Toxins* has shown a significant correlation between mycotoxin exposure and chronic fatigue.

3

Brain Fog, Memory Loss & Confusion

Losing words mid-sentence. Forgetting why you walked into a room. Feeling like your brain is wrapped in cotton.

Mycotoxins are neurotoxins. They cross the blood-brain barrier and directly affect your cognitive function. Research from the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey found that people living in water-damaged buildings showed measurable deficits in **reaction time, balance, color discrimination, and pattern memory** compared to controls.

In plain language: mold can make you feel like you're losing your mind. You forget appointments. You can't concentrate. You read the same paragraph three times. You search for words that used to come easily. You start questioning your own intelligence, your competence, your sanity.

This cognitive decline is one of the most frightening symptoms of mold exposure because it affects your ability to even recognize that something is wrong. Many people are misdiagnosed with early-onset dementia, ADHD, anxiety disorders, or depression when the real cause is a neurotoxic environment they're sleeping in every night.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR:

- Difficulty concentrating, especially when home. Notice if your focus improves at work or away.
- Word-finding difficulties that are new or worsening.
- Short-term memory problems: forgetting conversations, missing appointments, repeating yourself.
- Children struggling in school with focus, reading comprehension, or behavioral changes they didn't have before.

WHAT TO DO RIGHT NOW:

- Take a Visual Contrast Sensitivity (VCS) test online — it screens for biotoxin-related neurological impairment (available [here](#))
- Request a NeuroQuant MRI if symptoms are severe — it can show brain inflammation patterns consistent with mold
- Document cognitive changes with specific examples and dates for your medical records
- This is time-sensitive — prolonged mycotoxin exposure can cause lasting neurological damage

■ IMPORTANT:

Children are especially vulnerable to neurological effects of mold. If your child's grades dropped, behavior changed, or they developed attention issues after moving to a new home or after water damage, investigate mold immediately.

4

Respiratory Issues That Won't Go Away

Chronic cough. Sinus infections on repeat. Wheezing that came out of nowhere.

Your lungs are the front line. When you breathe in mold spores and mycotoxins, they land directly on the mucous membranes of your respiratory tract. Your body responds with inflammation, excess mucus production, and bronchial constriction — the classic symptoms of asthma, sinusitis, and chronic cough.

The Institute of Medicine (now the National Academy of Medicine) concluded that **there is sufficient evidence linking indoor mold exposure to upper respiratory symptoms, cough, wheeze, and asthma symptoms in sensitized persons.** The World Health Organization's guidelines on indoor air quality specifically cite dampness and mold as significant health risks.

What's particularly insidious is that many people develop respiratory symptoms gradually. A slight cough becomes chronic. Seasonal allergies become year-round. A single sinus infection becomes recurring infections every 6-8 weeks. Because it happens slowly, people adapt. They think it's normal. It's not.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR:

- A cough lasting more than 8 weeks, especially one that's worse at night or in the morning.
- Recurring sinus infections (3+ per year) — fungal sinusitis is commonly caused by mold.
- New-onset asthma or worsening of existing asthma without clear allergic triggers.
- A persistent "musty" smell in any room — that smell IS mold, even if you can't see it.
- Symptoms that worsen in specific rooms (often bathrooms, basements, or bedrooms with exterior walls).

WHAT TO DO RIGHT NOW:

- See an ENT (ear, nose, throat) specialist and specifically ask about fungal sinusitis
- Request a nasal swab culture — not just antibiotics — to identify if mold is present
- Check humidity levels in every room (buy a \$10 hygrometer — humidity above 60% feeds mold growth)
- Inspect behind toilets, under sinks, around windows, and behind furniture on exterior walls
- If you find visible mold, do NOT disturb it — disturbing mold releases spores into the air

5

Mysterious Skin Reactions

Rashes, hives, itching, or irritation that dermatologists can't explain.

Your skin is your largest organ, and it's one of the first places your body shows distress from toxic exposure. Mold-related skin reactions happen in two ways: **direct contact** with mold or contaminated materials, and **systemic response** from inhaling or ingesting mycotoxins that trigger an immune reaction expressed through the skin.

Common presentations include unexplained rashes (often on the torso, arms, or face), persistent itching without visible cause, hives that appear and disappear seemingly at random, and eczema flare-ups that don't respond to typical treatment. Some people develop a crawling sensation on their skin, or notice that wounds heal more slowly than they used to.

Dermatologists often treat these symptoms with topical steroids or antihistamines — which may provide temporary relief but won't resolve the underlying cause. If you're cycling through prescription creams and nothing works, it's worth asking whether your environment is the trigger.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR:

- New rashes or skin irritation that appeared after moving, after a leak, or during/after a wet season.
- Skin reactions that improve when you're away from home for several days.
- Itching or irritation that's worse at night (when you're in your bedroom for 8 hours).
- Children developing eczema or skin irritation they didn't have before.

WHAT TO DO RIGHT NOW:

- Document skin reactions with dated photos — this matters for medical and legal records
- Ask your dermatologist specifically about environmental triggers and mold exposure
- Wash all bedding in hot water (140°F minimum) weekly — bedding traps mold spores
- Consider a HEPA air purifier for your bedroom as an immediate step while investigating

6

Multiple Family Members Are Symptomatic

When the whole family is tired, sick, and struggling — it's probably not a coincidence.

This is one of the strongest indicators that your home environment is the problem. When multiple people under the same roof develop overlapping symptoms — even different ones — the common denominator is the building, not individual health issues.

Here's what this often looks like in a mold-affected family: Mom has chronic fatigue and brain fog. Dad has recurring sinus infections. The 8-year-old's asthma suddenly got worse. The teenager can't concentrate on homework. The family dog keeps getting ear infections. Each person sees a different doctor and gets a different diagnosis, but nobody connects the dots.

Pets are often the canary in the coal mine. Dogs and cats are lower to the ground where mold spores concentrate. Recurring ear infections, respiratory issues, lethargy, and skin irritation in pets can signal mold before human symptoms become severe. Veterinarians rarely think to ask about the home environment, so this connection is frequently missed.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR:

- Two or more family members with chronic, unexplained symptoms (even if the symptoms are different).
- Symptoms that started around the same time or after the same event (move, renovation, leak, storm).
- Pets with recurring infections, especially ear infections, respiratory issues, or lethargy.
- Guests or visitors commenting that they feel unwell, get headaches, or notice a smell in your home.

WHAT TO DO RIGHT NOW:

- Make a family health timeline: list each person's symptoms and when they started
- Cross-reference with home events: when did you move in? When was the last leak or flood? When was the roof last inspected?
- Take your timeline to a mold-literate healthcare provider — this pattern is diagnostic
- Schedule a professional mold inspection (not just a test kit from the hardware store)

■ **IMPORTANT:**

Home mold test kits from hardware stores are unreliable. They detect mold spores that are present in ALL air. A positive result doesn't tell you if levels are dangerous, and a negative result doesn't mean you're safe. Always use a certified mold inspector (look for ACAC, CMI, or CIEC credentials).

7

Symptoms Started After a Water Event

A flood, a leak, a burst pipe, a roof problem, or even high humidity. Then everything changed.

Mold needs just three things to grow: moisture, warmth, and organic material (wood, drywall, carpet, insulation). When water enters your home — whether from a dramatic flood or a slow, hidden leak — mold can begin growing **within 24-48 hours**. Once established, it produces mycotoxins continuously and can spread behind walls, under flooring, and through HVAC systems to contaminate areas far from the original water source.

The most dangerous scenarios are often the least visible. A slow leak under a bathroom vanity. A pinhole drip in an upstairs pipe that soaks the wall cavity below. Condensation forming inside walls in humid climates. Ice dams causing roof leaks that nobody notices until the ceiling stains. A washing machine supply line that drips behind the wall for months.

If your health changed after any kind of water event in your home — even one that seemed minor and was "fixed" — **the fix may not have been enough**. Drying visible water without addressing what happened inside the walls is like putting a band-aid on a wound without cleaning it first. The damage continues, invisible and growing, while you breathe it in every day.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR:

- Any history of water intrusion: floods, leaks, burst pipes, roof damage, ice dams, or plumbing issues.
- Water stains on ceilings or walls (even old, dried ones — the mold may still be active behind them).
- Warped or buckled flooring, especially in bathrooms, kitchens, or laundry rooms.
- Peeling paint or bubbling wallpaper — signs of moisture trapped in walls.
- A musty or earthy smell in any room, closet, or cabinet.
- Condensation on windows — a sign that indoor humidity is too high.

WHAT TO DO RIGHT NOW:

- Check humidity in every room (keep below 50% — ideally 30-45%)
- Inspect ALL areas that have had any water contact, even years ago
- Look behind furniture on exterior walls, under sinks, around toilets, behind refrigerators
- If you find ANY visible mold: stop, document with photos, do NOT try to clean it yourself
- Call a certified mold inspector — not a remediation company (those who test should NOT be the ones who remediate)

■ IMPORTANT:

If you had a water event and were told it was 'dried out' or 'taken care of' without professional mold testing and remediation, the problem may still be active. Mold can grow and produce mycotoxins behind walls for years after a water event that was improperly remediated.

What To Do Next

If you recognized yourself or your family in 2 or more of these signs, it's time to take action. Not panic — action. Here's your immediate next-step roadmap:

TODAY	Start your symptom journal. Download our free template at themoldlady.com/journal . Track symptoms, location, and severity for every family member, including pets.
THIS WEEK	Buy an inexpensive hygrometer (\$10-15 at any hardware store) and check humidity in every room. Any reading above 50% needs attention. Above 60% is actively feeding mold growth.
WITHIN 2 WEEKS	Schedule a professional mold inspection with a certified inspector (ACAC, CMI, or CIEC credentials). Expect to pay \$300-\$600 for a thorough inspection with air sampling. This is NOT the same as a home mold test kit.
IMMEDIATELY IF VISIBLE MOLD	Document with photos. Do not disturb it. Do not attempt to clean it yourself. Do not let a contractor simply paint over it. Contact a certified inspector first, then a separate remediation company.

PROTECT YOUR LEGAL RIGHTS FROM DAY ONE

Everything you document now could matter later. If your mold exposure was caused by a builder's negligence, a landlord's failure to address water damage, or an insurance company's refusal to cover a legitimate claim, your photos, symptom journals, medical records, and communication logs become critical evidence. Start documenting immediately. Save every email, text, and receipt. Take photos with timestamps. Keep originals of all medical records.

For a complete evidence preservation guide and legal rights overview, visit themoldlady.com/legal to download our free Legal Survival Guide, co-authored with Christina Baer, former U.S. Attorney.

About Shemane Nugent

Shemane Nugent is a New York Times bestselling author, fitness expert, television host, and toxic mold survivor. After nearly dying from mold exposure in her own home, she wrote *Killer House* to share her story and help families recognize the hidden danger in their homes. She has spent over two decades researching, recovering from, and raising awareness about toxic mold illness. She hosts *Faith & Freedom* on Real America's Voice and has been featured on MTV, VH1, CMT, Discovery Channel, Fox News, Entertainment Tonight, and C-SPAN.

Get More Help — For Free

The Mold Crisis Survival Guide

A comprehensive 25-page guide covering your first 24-72 hours after discovering mold, including the complete 4-Pillar Framework for Home, Body, Family, and Legal recovery.

The Mold Symptom Self-Assessment Quiz

A 50-question assessment that identifies your exposure level and which of the 4 pillars needs the most urgent attention. Personalized results and recommendations.

Killer House Podcast

Real stories of families whose homes made them sick. Survivors, experts, attorneys, and advocates sharing the information that could save your life. Available on all podcast platforms and YouTube.

themoldlady.com

@themoldlady on Instagram | Killer House Podcast on YouTube

Your home shouldn't make you sick. And now it doesn't have to.

