

Candida Overgrowth and its Association to Sick Building Syndrome

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Candida albicans is a yeast that is considered a normal part of the human digestive system. It is a fungi that is capable of changing from one that promotes health to one that is pathogenic. It is believed that an acidic gut triggers *C. albicans* to change into the harmful yeast which forms filament-like roots that invade tissue in search of nourishment.

The overgrowth of *Candida* leads to symptoms wherever it colonizes. Itching, irritable bowel, allergies, heartburn and a sore throat are examples of the variety of ways in which yeast manifests its presence. Left untreated, yeast overgrowth can also manifest itself as a cause of mental and emotional issues.

The bacteria in a healthy immune system keep *Candida* in check. Should the immune system weaken, the *Candida* growth can take over and attempt to colonize all bodily tissues.

There are many factors that can upset the ecological balance of the body, weaken the immune system and allow yeast to proliferate. The major risk factors are:

- Use of steroids, immune-suppressing drugs or antibiotics
- Pregnancy or use of birth control pills
- Diets high in carbohydrate and sugar intake
- Ingesting yeast products, molds or fermented foods
- Prolonged airborne exposure to environmental molds

Once begun, *Candida* overgrowth can result in a self-perpetuating negative cycle. If not recognized and treated appropriately, yeast overgrowth will weaken the immune system and allow other harmful invaders to cause illness. Some medical professionals believe that a chronic *Candida* issue can exhaust the immune system and may even play a role in the development of cancer. Thus, *Candida* overgrowth should not be taken lightly.

When Yeast and Environmental Molds Collide

Yeast tend to secrete a toxin called Gliotoxin, which is also produced by three species of *Aspergillus* mold commonly detected in water-damaged buildings: *A. flavus*, *A. fumigatus* and *A. niger*. Gliotoxin is an immune suppressant that increases risk from yeast overgrowth. It should be noted that, unlike many toxins, Gliotoxin is not common in our food supply. Gliotoxin has also been observed as a probable factor in human mycoses caused by *A. fumigatus* and has been implicated in two studies of mice with aspergillosis when the mice received repeated doses of steroids.

If you believe exposure to environmental molds may be impacting your health, ask your doctor about collecting a blood sample to be analyzed for *Candida* and *Aspergillus* mold.

Craig Whittaker has been actively involved in environmental health for nearly twenty years and in 2002 founded Environmental Solutions Group, an environmental consulting firm in Greensboro NC. He has assessed over one thousand properties for indoor air quality, microbial hazards and airborne particulate matter. Dr. Whittaker's interests include children's health, toxicology and creating sustainable and healthy indoor environments. He is a member of the American Industrial Hygiene Association, the Indoor Air Quality Association, and is the only hygienist who has been accepted as a member of the American Academy of Environmental Medicine.

