

Mold Illness: The Root of Many Health Issues

Brendan Vermeire, FDN, CPT



How to Heal from Mold Illness

Rebekah Kelley: Welcome to the Humanized podcast, all about personalizing your health. I'm your host, Rebekah Kelley, and today our topic will be How to Heal from Mold Illness, with functional medicine consultant, Brendan Vermeire. A little bit about Brendan, but before I introduce him, I want to remind everyone to subscribe and get all the other variety of casts in audio, video and transcription at HumanizedHealth.com. Also, I want to send out a thank you to our lead sponsor, Village Green Apothecary, and please go visit them at MyVillageGreen.com.

So, let me go ahead and share with you. Brendan is a functional medicine consultant, clinical researcher, board certified holistic health practitioner, master nutrition coach, master personal trainer, USAW Sports Performance Coach, and CrossFit certified trainer. Brendan is regarded as one of the top leading experts in metabolic health and holistic education. He's the proud owner of the Metabolic Solutions Institute, dedicated to educating health professionals and clinicians with cutting-edge strategies to best serve their clients and their patients.

So, Brendan, thanks for being with us.

Brendan Vermeire: Yeah. Thanks for having me back, Rebekah. It's always a pleasure.

Rebekah Kelley: Always so much fun. And it's very impressive, all your list of... and I heard you're also writing a book. Is that true?

Brendan Vermeire: Yeah. It's in the works. I'm hoping to get started on that.

Rebekah Kelley: We'll have to have you back when that comes out and talk about it.

Brendan Vermeire: Yeah. Might be a minute, but we'll get there.

Rebekah Kelley: So we're here to hear what you can share about mold, which is something that's definitely impacting a lot of individuals' health. And you're going to talk about that and explain what's happening and how does it impact... I think one of the effects I've heard a lot of is actually mental health and mental wellness too, right?

Brendan Vermeire: Mm-hmm, yeah, absolutely. It's a huge, huge issue that I think is gaining a lot of traction and awareness currently. And those of us in the mold space, we kind of joke about it's like the mold rush, where everybody's sort of rushing to figure out this mold thing. There is some degree of awareness and a little bit of sensationalism. So it's kind of blowing up right now. But it is still a huge issue. I mean, the majority of homes and buildings in America and probably the rest of the world are water damaged and probably do have some degree of elevated mycotoxins and VOCs [volatile organic compounds] and lipopolysaccharides, and it's an air quality issue, primarily, that then could potentially cause kind of that sick building syndrome or CIRS [chronic inflammatory response syndrome] or mycotoxicosis – some form of mold illness.

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So there's this huge conversation to unpack around the various ways that mold, through environmental exposure or our own internal microbiome and a microbiome dysbiosis, can then lead to some sort of illness manifestation.

Rebekah Kelley: So you said it's kind of blown up, so I mean, in your estimation then, like how common is toxic mold exposure?

Brendan Vermeire: Ah, extremely common. And it's crazy when you kind of go back through the history where there's references to mold in the Bible, or there was St. Anthony's fire, which was this, basically, an ergot poisoning or a fungal poisoning from the crops over in, I think somewhere in Europe, in like the, I don't know, 18th century. It was hundreds of years ago.

And at a global level, actually, there's a lot of research going into mycotoxin contamination of agricultural goods, primarily grains. So at more of a global epidemiological level, the primary scientific interest is looking at Asia and Africa, where there's millions and millions of people that are consuming dangerously high levels of mold toxins through their food, because they don't have the same sophisticated, regulated agricultural system that we do in America. And so really it's liver cancer and kidney failure that are the primary things that they're studying. Whereas then, in sort of our niche functional medicine industry in America, which is kind of a privileged industry and a privileged good, if we're being honest, now there's this heightened sensationalism of, well, mold is the root cause of all root causes. And so now everybody's running mycotoxin urinary tests and it's getting a little bit out of control. But I'm glad to see increased awareness. But we also have to bring some objectivity and be rational with how we're approaching it and qualifying it.

Rebekah Kelley: Well, you're here to help us with that, right?

Brendan Vermeire: Yeah [laughs].

Rebekah Kelley: Because it's like a swing, right? As soon as you find, I mean... I notice even with myself, as I find something out, I'll swing all the way, like, that's all I read about, that's all I think about, right? Until I kind of put my arms around it and then I kind of might not pay it [as much attention]... You've got to find that center part. Hopefully you'll help us find that center part today.

So how can mold and mold toxins then drive illness? Because you said that there's, that we were looking at it, saying that's kind of becoming the root of illness. Right? So how does that dysfunction manifest in the body from mold?

Brendan Vermeire: Yeah, absolutely. So we have to obviously keep in mind that humans are a pretty young, immature, naive species that have only been around for, you know, a few hundred thousand years, depending on the chronological timeline you're looking at. Whereas

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fungi and bacteria have been around for hundreds of millions of years. So, we have to recognize, we evolved with mold. And actually, emerging research on the human microbiome or the fungal component of the microbiome, we're starting to see evidence that suggests that even some of these scary toxin-producing molds, like aspergillus or penicillium or fusarium or whatever, they seem to be a relatively normal part of the human microbiome.

My theory, based on the evidence, is like, well, I think even some of these scary molds probably play an important role in digestion and gastrointestinal processes, but just like anything else, it's about balance. So if that microbiome is becoming dysbiotic and the mold is overgrowing, just like with candida – you know, we typically think of invasive candidiasis in terms of severe immunosuppression, like HIV or something like that. Whereas now we kind of know it's like, well, even a more mild candida overgrowth could then cause like a leaky gut, leaky brain.

And so it's the same conversation, it's just, now we're talking about mold instead of yeast, you know, candida versus aspergillus. But nonetheless, the mold can really drive leaky gut, leaky brain, systemic inflammation, and immunosuppression through oxidative stress and mycotoxin poisoning, essentially. So it really is these fungal toxins or mycotoxins that drive most of the illness in the body.

But again, this is where we have to kind of contextualize, because it's like, we all have some degree of mold in our guts already. We all have some degree of mold in all of our environments, but then it becomes this, like, if there's too much toxic mold exposure and not enough immunological metabolic resilience, that's where homeostasis will be disrupted and illness starts setting in.

Rebekah Kelley: That makes so much sense. Yes, because it is in the environment around us. I remember I was raking leaves one fall and it's like, they're all covered in mold already, right? So, there's no way I'm not breathing that as I'm raking. Yeah. And that's just one. Then I'm doing dishes and I realize, oh, my wood spoons got some... like, it's kind of everywhere, right?

Brendan Vermeire: Yeah.

Rebekah Kelley: So what signs and symptoms might be suggestive of mold illness? What are the things that we know and we can say, hey, am I being exposed to mold in my environment?

Brendan Vermeire: Yeah, the that's probably the trickiest part with mold, is it's kind of the great mimicker, just like Lyme disease, where it can manifest in just about any sort of system of the body. It could be... IBS could be mold driven. It could be your brain fog and anxiety and depression. It could be the joint pain in the fibromyalgia. It's a big contributor to autism. So that's where, typically, with some of the more severe symptom clusters, like I would say brain fog is probably the most common symptom, the musculoskeletal pain and peripheral neuropathy. And yeah, you've probably got some degree of depression, fatigue, insomnia,

which is all very much neuroinflammatory driven. So, it's almost ambiguous and nebulous with, we can't really draw like, well this symptom, that mold, particularly, but the more severely ill somebody is, we have to be doing that through intake of asking about their environment, assessing their gut health. But anybody that has any evidence of water damage to their home or where they're spending their time, or a lot of gut-brain axis symptomology, kind of the IBS and cognitive psychiatric stuff, I do think it's worth looking into the mold aspect or starting at least to ask some of those questions about mold and mold exposure.

Rebekah Kelley: So, I'm probably not being very PC to use this word, but I'm not crazy, I just have mold. Right? I mean that you could literally say that, maybe.

Brendan Vermeire: Yeah, yeah.

Rebekah Kelley: You know, because the symptoms you're describing sound very much like a little bit of depression and things even just from being quarantined for so long, right? Some of us were experiencing some of the things... You start getting, you're in a small space, it can start sounding like so many different things. Is there anything that rises to the top, other than maybe you're just not getting better? And if you start noticing you have this, how do you get diagnosed with it? And then, what are your strategies then for healing yourself? Like, how do we put those things together?

Brendan Vermeire: Yeah. I mean, it becomes a really big conversation. And part of the problem is conventional medicine is just not anywhere near getting to the point where they're getting behind this mold illness concept. They are astute to the idea of, like, an invasive aspergillosis of the lungs, which is usually what kills people with cystic fibrosis, where these people, because of the genetic seize, they can't clear out their lungs, so they get recurrent, fungal and bacterial infections. Or invasive candidiasis.

But conventional medicine is not really a lot of help right now with the mold illness conversation. You know, fungal infection, sure. But they don't really have a good grasp on the human microbiome or how microbiome issues play into IBS or IBD, that's just not the way that they work. If you mention mold at all to a conventional doctor, they'll maybe do like a mold allergy test like IGG. But that's not the same thing because with mold, there's all these different types of mold illness. There's more of just a fungal dysbiosis in the gut. Or we might call that SIFO [small intestinal fungal overgrowth], or just microbiome dysbiosis, or mold colonization, or whatever. Then there's the more mycotoxicosis, which is referring to the buildup of mycotoxins in the body. That's poisoning the body from the inside out. Then there's more the chronic inflammatory response syndrome or CIRS, which is really a pseudo diagnosis that's kind of paralleling basically sepsis or SIRS, S-I-R-S, which is an ICD 10 [International Classification of Diseases] diagnosis. So it's all these, like, pseudo diagnoses that make it really ambiguous.

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And then of course, with the majority of homes being water damaged, that's where we need a lot more research at the epidemiological level, because it's like, well, I would bet that if we did, like, urinary mycotoxin testing on everybody in the country, pretty much everybody's going to have some degree of mycotoxins coming out of their body. Just like glyphosate.

So, this is where I think the conversation has to shift into, well, how do we develop resilience against mold? Which, it's the same conversation as COVID, where you can't avoid COVID forever. It's not about avoidance. It's about cultivating resilience and achieving that immunological resilience to the mold or glyphosate, or whatever it is.

Rebekah Kelley: So that your body can fight it off and heal.

Brendan Vermeire: Yeah.

Rebekah Kelley: But I would assume too, part of it is identifying, like you said, if you have damage in your home, you're going to have to remediate that because as long as there's that in your environment, you're going to continue to be affecting yourself, right? So you kind of have to look at your environment, where your exposure is – I'm thinking, as you're describing this – and then figure out then from there, where do you go?

If someone wanted to find out more about this, obviously they could visit your website, right? But when you said most doctors, is it like, you're looking for someone who's functional medicine oriented? If someone's trying to personalize their, you know, because this is what this is about, right? Personalized health. If someone says, wow, I think the way's Brendan's talking, I kind of think that might be my situation. Like what would they start? Would they Google mold and functional medicine? Or how would they figure that out?

Brendan Vermeire: Yeah, the mold space isn't huge. I'm pretty well established in that space and it's, I feel like there's a small handful of us that are... and it's exploding right now. But that's the thing, I'm seeing all these people running wild with mycotoxin testing. I don't think they're approaching it super well and it almost seems to be creating more problems than solving.

So I have a lot of great free mold resources and stuff, that at least can be a starting point for people and probably empower people to take some next steps.

Rebekah Kelley: And they can go to your website for this?

Brendan Vermeire: Of course, yeah.

Rebekah Kelley: MetabolicSolutionsLLC.com? That's where we're going to send them? Okay.

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Brendan Vermeire: Yeah. Sure.

Rebekah Kelley: And I'll repeat that afterwards, but just a great place to get started. And then Brendan, is there anything else you'd want to suggest for someone, because we've got a couple of minutes free. Like, how would they get started? Obviously, they can look up your resources. And what are they going to find when they go there?

Brendan Vermeire: Yeah, well, I have a free mold guide that's probably around 10 pages or something. It's kind of, honestly, it's a really comprehensive guide because it covers what testing should we be using to qualify the symptoms that might be characteristic of mold, some foundational strategies. Honestly, if people really use the information in that guide, I don't know that they would really even need a professional, to be honest. It's pretty thorough.

Rebekah Kelley: Awesome. Okay. That's amazing. Okay, well, thanks Brendan. Really valuable insights. I'm going to repeat it again. Brendan Vermeire, and he can be found at www.MetabolicSolutionsLLC.com. That's spelled M E T A B O L I C S O L U T I O N S L L C.com. Let me remind you to subscribe and get access to all Humanized videos, podcasts and transcriptions from all of our thought leaders, like Brendan, on personalized health at HumanizedHealth.com. Please come back and see us again.

Brendan Vermeire: Thanks, Rebekah.