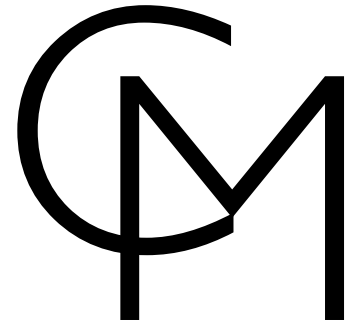


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Approach the new year with purpose and reflection

By Tawawn Lowe

Just a smidge into the New Year and you might already be feeling like you didn't start it right. For a lot of people, when the fireworks die down, they still have to wake up to the same life, with the same job and aspirations. What should be different?

Here are five tips on how you can start your year on the right track. If you're determined for your personal and professional growth this year, then these tips are for you.



Did you manage to pivot so you could still reach your goal?

What would you change about the way you handled the situation (think global, professional and personal situations)?

While this exercise requires you to be self-critical, be careful not to put yourself down. If there were situations you could have handled better, acknowledge that with respect and objectivity, not malice and self-hatred.

The right amount of self-criticism will wake you up and push you to be better. If you start feeling discouraged anytime during your reflection, remind yourself that you are still standing and you are actively working towards being better. That is the making of a strong individual.

1. Reflect on the previous year
The first step towards a better future is taking stock of what happened in the past. To say 2022 was a tough year is an understatement. Just like everybody else, you had to deal with a situation you could never have dreamed of, and that undoubtedly had a lasting effect on you.

Start with what you liked about the previous year. This can be hard, considering the year in question, but if you look back with an objective lens and a clearer view, you may notice some blessings you hadn't considered before. As you do your reflections, here are some questions for you to consider:

What worked for you professionally?

What worked in your personal life?

What had you envisioned for the year versus where you are now?

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Sit less, move more for optimal health

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Clean up mold and mildew in your office

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Growth: Set goals, set a schedule, clear your mind

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2. Set your goals

Now that you have a clear understanding of what went right and what went sideways in the last year, you can move forward into your present and your future. Set your goals for the year and plan how you will achieve them.

After the reflection exercise, you may notice that you still have some outstanding goals from last year. Before you put them down as this year's goals, think carefully about why they are still outstanding and if they still align with your beliefs, or really something you want. What you wanted in the previous could have changed for many of reasons.

One thing that I find people are afraid to do is to let go. Sometimes your beliefs and aspirations change, especially when you have a life-altering experience. Letting go of your previous outlook can be scary, especially since it means embracing the unknown most of the time. However, keeping goals that no longer align with your true essence will only waste time and energy, both of which are vital resources you need to guard diligently and spend wisely.

3. Cultivate your support system

This step is really important and it's one that gets overlooked most often. Looking at your list of goals, you may feel like you can achieve them all on your own. The idea of being "self-made" has been pushed down our throats for years now, and asking for help is seen as a weakness. Nothing could be further from the truth!

No human being is an island. Unless you're a monk seeking enlightenment through solitude, isolating yourself for prolonged periods of time is a bad idea. Studies have shown that prolonged isolation can result in cognitive decline.

Michael Siffre, a French scientist and adventurer, shut himself up in a cave for six months as part of an experiment. By the end of the second month, he



reported that he could "barely string thoughts together." And he still had four months to go!

Isolation is not only social. You could be surrounded by people and still feel a sense of isolation. It's harder to spot, but that's why this isolation is so insidious.

In a culture that is increasingly looking to cut people off, go against the grain and feed the relationships that are most important to you. Identify the people who have been instrumental in your life and make time for them. Allow them to support you, and in turn, support them.

4. Set a schedule

Here's a public secret: nothing gets done that you don't set time for. You know how people say they are busy all the time? Well, the truth is, whatever they put off with those two words "I'm busy" really just isn't a priority in their life. What you prioritize, you make time for. Which brings us to this fourth tip. Create a schedule. And stick to it.

I know a lot of people hate schedules, preferring to go with the flow instead, and believe that a free-range approach is effective. However, in my experience, the free range approach rarely works, and when it does, it's only for small to intermediate goals. If your goals are big to the point where they scare you, then a schedule is your best

friend.

First of all, your schedule tells you what's most important in the current season of your life. It also shows you exactly how much time you could be stealing away from your top priority through procrastination and other bad habits. A schedule also helps you to cultivate the necessary discipline that every successful person has. Once you set your schedule and you stick to it, you gain a new-found respect for your time and energy, as well as for other people's time and energy.

Note: When setting your schedule, the goal is not to fill it with tons of things every single day. It's to create the kind of day you would find most meaningful and fulfilling. That includes talking to your friends, going out where possible, and spending time with family.

5. Detox from social media

Finally, it's important for you to start your year by taking time away from social media. The fear of missing out (FOMO) keeps us glued to our screens, mindlessly scrolling on social media timelines and consuming all kinds of content. The result? Information overload.

We live in the age of information, and there has been immense good done as a result of the technological advances made over the years. However, information overload has begun to pose serious issues in society. Information overload reportedly has terrible effects on the human brain, not least of which is decreased information retention and feeling burnt out (even when you haven't been all that productive).

A healthy way to start the year would be to go off the grid for some time, a weekend, a week or if you're really committed, a month. Take this time to reconnect with yourself, pick up a new hobby that doesn't require any gadgets, such as painting, reading or walking.

Some benefits of a social media detox include mood improvements, higher self-esteem and being more present as you connect more with the real world.

Mind-gut connection: Stress and digestive health

By Nick Kowalski

Most of us have direct experience of how chronic, or intense psychological stress can affect the digestive system. Ancient practitioners of Chinese Medicine also theorized that the gut (particularly the liver) was the seat of emotions. Modern science explains this phenomena, discovering that up to 90% of our neurotransmitters and hormone are actually produced in the gut.

What Happens to Digestion When We're Stressed

Something not many of us know, at least logically, is that the digestive system is in fact governed by the Central Nervous System, namely a sub-branch of the nervous system referred to as the parasympathetic nervous system. In essence, the parasympathetic system is our "rest and digest" state. Only when we are relaxed and free of stress does the parasympathetic system and therefore digestion, activate.

When we enter a state of stress, the counterpart to the parasympathetic system; the sympathetic system, activates. This stress state or the "fight or flight" response shuts down digestion by reducing blood flow to the digestive organs, inhibits digestive fluid secretion, and instead sends the blood and biological energy to muscular-skeletal system to prepare for battle.

When the sympathetic system is chronically stimulated by prolonged stress, it can lead to gastrointestinal disorders, inflammation and weaken the immune system.

One example of how stress can cause common digestive issues is by causing the esophagus to spasm and altering stomach acid secretion. This leads to heartburn, acid reflux and can make you feel nauseous. Another example is the effects stress has on the colon. Intense stress increases the secretion of stress hormones cortisol, prolactin and serotonin, which can cause the colon to become hyperactive or tense, which leads diarrhea or constipation.

When any of these conditions become persistent, the inflammation and overall poor functioning of the digestive system can eventually lead to stomach ulcers, IBS, and inflammatory bowel disease.

How to Manage Stress for Better Digestion

Reducing total stress is not a quick-fix job, it requires a holistic, multi-factorial approach. However, psychological stress is one of the primary, dominant stressors that negatively affect the digestive system. While getting a handle on the causes of psychological stress can take time, there are some simple things you can do to mitigate their effects.

One simple way to de-stress is to engage in fun, moderate exercise. Physical exercise relieves tension, gets us out of our heads, improves our mood by releasing endorphins but also helps with the elimination of stress hormones. Some of the healthiest forms of exercise include walking, hiking, biking, swimming, dancing, yoga, thai qi, and weight lifting.

Other great ways to reduce stress include:

Relaxation - People with digestive issues are often overly stressed and do not relax enough. Getting authentic, deep relaxation is more challenging in today's world, but can be achieved through yoga, meditation, progressive muscle relaxation, visualization, cognitive therapy, biofeedback, good music, spending time in nature, camping, love-making, and working on an enjoyable project or hobby.

Communication therapy - A major source of psychological stress dwells in the world of communication. In fact, most stress and problems in life have their roots in communication trouble. If you've ever been in a situation where you didn't know what to say, or someone wasn't talking to you, you know the stress associated with poor communication. Taking courses or reading books communications can be helpful for improving our quality of life, relationships and reducing a great

source of stress. However, simply having a good friend or loved one you can talk to freely about your stress can be a major stress reliever. Personally, I have found cognitive therapy to be a major help in relieving chronic stress in my life. There are even studies that have demonstrated a 70 percent improvement in stress symptoms after 12 weeks of cognitive therapy.

Nutrition - A bad diet can ruin a good digestive system. Poor nutrition can be a source of biological stress, but also, eating the right foods can help curb the effects of stress. In general, it is helpful to eat more protein and salt when stressed. In fact, soldiers in the army are required to eat a higher protein diet to mitigate the catabolic effects of combat. So, it is best to take a two-sided approach nutritionally, where you avoid junk foods that add to your stress, and eat nutrient-dense, wholesome foods that help replenish a stressed body.

Choose your battles - An interesting thing about life is that problems seem to be valuable. If we had no problems at all, we'd be existentially bored. So, the goal is not to eliminate all problems and stress from our lives. Instead, we need to pick our problems wisely. For example, starting a new fulfilling relationship will have its challenges, but in the end, the problems are usually worth it. Same goes for starting a new project or goal. A good rule of thumb is that any given condition in life would ideally be 80% pleasure with 20% pain, the pain being the optimal amount of stress that just makes life interesting and helps us grow.

Mental and emotional stress can cause a lot of problems for an otherwise healthy digestive system. Stress all together is unavoidable, it seems to be a natural part of the game of life. What's important is how we react to our stress and problems, and that we ultimately avoid it from becoming chronic. If you know you are under too much stress and/or having symptoms of digestive stress, then these tips will help. If stress management is the problem, there are cognitive therapists, yoga and medication instructors who can provide verified help.

The health risks of prolonged sitting

By Dr. Pran Rangan

It is a well established fact that sitting for extended periods of time can be bad for personal health. Global studies show that on average we sit 7.7 hours a day. Whereas some studies have found that a large number of people sit up to 15 hours a day. The problem only gets worse with age. Adults 60 years and older spend between 8.5 to 9.6 hours a day in sedentary time.

The researchers have found that even if we exercise regularly, prolonged sedentary time could negatively impact the health of our heart and blood vessels. Moreover, a sedentary lifestyle may also be associated with an increased risk of diabetes, impaired insulin sensitivity and a higher risk of death from any cause.

The exact mechanisms behind the ill-effects aren't yet clear. Some experts theorize that more sitting leads to reductions in insulin sensitivity, while others believe net calorie expenditures decline as sitting increases.

The specific guidelines recommend that for every 30 consecutive minutes of sitting, stand up and move/walk for three to five minutes to reduce the health risks from sitting.

Some health risks of increased sitting

Decreases energy expenditure - It can give rise to low energy expenditure, leading to overweight and obesity.

Decreases insulin sensitivity - It can cause a decrease in insulin sensitivity, leading to full-blown type-2 diabetes.

Causes metabolic syndrome - It contributes to metabolic syndrome.

Increases cardio-vascular diseases - It sharply increases risk of cardio-vascular diseases. The researchers have found that men who reported >10 h x



wk (-1) riding in a car or >23 h x wk (-1) of combined sedentary behavior had 82% and 64% greater risk of dying from CVD than those who reported <4 or <11 h x wk (-1), respectively.

Promotes cancer - A couple of studies have documented higher rates of cancer and cancer-related deaths in very sedentary people. A sedentary life style has been consistently associated with an increased risk of colon cancer, but the evidence for its association with breast and other gynecologic cancers is limited.

Causes depression - It can cause loneliness and depression as being stuck at the desk or chair means not getting outside enough. Therefore, it reduces the social circle of people. Coupled with this, the lack of sunshine can cause deficiency of vitamin-D, leading to depression. This underlies internet paradox that an advance in social technology leads to health problems.

Bad for back, neck, arms and legs - Prolonged sitting is ergonomically bad for back as it excessively increases back pressure, which may lead to chronic back ache. Besides, it can cause increased stress on the back, neck, arms and legs.

Increases all cause mortality - Prolonged sitting increases all cause mortality independent of regular physical activity. A study found prolonged sitting time was responsible for 6.9% of deaths.

Tips to reduce sedentary time

- Take a three to five minute break about every half hour during the day to stand, which burns twice as many calories as sitting, or move around.

- Watch TV while standing or exercising.

- Try standing and moving whenever you are talking on a cell phone.

- Standing desks also can help those who are stuck in a cubicle or office all day. Such desks offer the user the option to transition easily from sitting to standing position, being freely able to transition throughout the workday.

The crux of the matter

The scientific community has coined a word - sitting disease, which is commonly used when referring to metabolic syndrome and the ill-effects of an overly sedentary lifestyle.

There is a common misconception among people that if they engage in the recommended 150 minutes of moderate to vigorous activity per week, they can compensate for prolonged sitting. Conversely, they are still subject to the negative impact of too much sitting, which has been conclusively found.

But the good news is that if we choose to stand up, sit less and move more, we can experience a great number of attainable benefits to our health.

Dr. Pran Rangan is a physician with expertise in writing articles on health related topics. His areas of special interest are cardiology, diabetes and exercise and fitness.

Musculoskeletal injuries in the workplace

Musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) affect the muscles, nerves, blood vessels, ligaments and tendons. Workers in many different industries and occupations can be exposed to risk factors at work, such as lifting heavy items, bending, reaching overhead, pushing and pulling heavy loads, working in awkward body postures and performing the same or similar tasks repetitively. Exposure to these known risk factors for MSDs increases a worker's risk of injury.

Work-related MSDs can be prevented. Ergonomics—fitting a job to a person—helps lessen muscle fatigue, increases productivity and reduces the number and severity of work-related MSDs.

Employers are responsible for providing a safe and healthful workplace for their workers. In the workplace, the number and severity of MSDs resulting from physical overexertion, and their associated costs, can be substantially reduced by applying ergonomic principles.

Implementing an ergonomic process is effective in reducing the risk of developing MSDs in high-risk industries as diverse as construction, food processing, firefighting, office jobs, healthcare, transportation and warehousing. The following are important elements of an ergonomic process:

- **Provide Management Support** - A strong commitment by management is critical to the overall success of an ergonomic process. Management should define clear goals and objectives for the ergonomic process, discuss them with their workers, assign responsibilities to designated staff members, and communicate clearly with the workforce.

- **Involve Workers** - A participatory ergonomic approach, where workers are directly involved in worksite assessments, solution development and implementation is the essence of a successful ergonomic



process. Workers can assist in the ergonomic process by voicing their concerns and suggestions for reducing exposure to risk factors and by evaluating the changes made as a result of an ergonomic assessment.

- **Provide Training** - Training is an important element in the ergonomic process. It ensures that workers are aware of ergonomics and its benefits, become informed about ergonomics related concerns in the workplace, and understand the importance of reporting early symptoms of MSDs.

- **Identify Problems** - An important step in the ergonomic process is to identify and assess ergonomic problems in the workplace before they result in MSDs.

- **Encourage Early Reporting of MSD Symptoms** - Early reporting can accelerate the job assessment and improvement process, helping to prevent or reduce the progression of symptoms, the development of serious injuries, and subsequent lost-time claims.

- **Implement Solutions to Control Hazards** - There are many possible solutions that can be implemented to reduce, control or eliminate workplace MSDs.

- **Evaluate Progress** - Established evaluation and corrective action procedures are required to periodically

assess the effectiveness of the ergonomic process and to ensure its continuous improvement and long-term success. As an ergonomic process is first developing, assessments should include determining whether goals set for the ergonomic process have been met and determining the success of the implemented ergonomic solutions.

By looking critically at your workplace operations, you can identify risk factors and eliminate or control them as early as possible.

The risk of MSD injury depends on work positions and postures, how often the task is performed, the level of required effort and how long the task lasts. Risk factors that may lead to the development of MSDs include:

- **Exerting excessive force.** Examples include lifting heavy objects or people, pushing or pulling heavy loads, manually pouring materials, or maintaining control of equipment or tools.
- **Performing the same or similar tasks repetitively.** Performing the same motion or series of motions continually or frequently for an extended period of time.
- **Working in awkward postures or being in the same posture for long periods of time.** Using positions that place stress on the body, such as prolonged or repetitive reaching above shoulder height, kneeling, squatting, leaning over a counter, using a knife with wrists bent, or twisting the torso while lifting.
- **Localized pressure into the body part.** Pressing the body or part of the body (such as the hand) against hard or sharp edges, or using the hand as a hammer.
- **Cold temperatures.** In combination with any one of the above risk factors may also increase the potential for MSDs to develop. For example, many of the operations in

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MSDs: Design work tasks to limit risks

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meatpacking and poultry processing occur with a chilled product or in a cold environment.

- Vibration, both whole body and hand-arm, can cause a number of health effects. Hand-arm vibration can damage small capillaries that supply nutrients and can make hand tools more difficult to control. Hand-arm vibration may cause a worker to lose feeling in the hands and arms resulting in increased force exertion to control hand-powered tools (e.g. hammer drills, portable grinders, chainsaws) in much the same way gloves limit feeling in the hands. The effects of vibration can damage the body and greatly increase the force which must be exerted for a task.

- Combined exposure to several risk factors. May place workers at a higher risk for MSDs than does exposure to any one risk factor.

In addition, observe whether workers are modifying their tools, equipment or work area, shaking their arms and hands, rolling their shoulders, or bringing products such as back belts or wrist braces into the workplace

These behaviors can mean that workers are experiencing ergonomic issues. Talk with them and review their work to see if any risk factors for MSDs are present. Workers can identify and provide important information about hazards in their workplaces. Their opinions and suggestions for change also are valuable.

Once problem jobs are identified, conducting an in-depth ergonomic job analysis can help identify solutions to prevent MSDs. An ergonomic job hazard analysis is a technique that focuses on job tasks as a way to identify hazards before they occur. It focuses on the relationship between the worker, the task, the tools, and the work environment.

Many industries have successfully implemented ergonomic solutions in



their facilities as a way to address their workers' MSD injury risks. These interventions have included modifying existing equipment, making changes in work practices and purchasing new tools or other devices to assist in the production process. Making these changes has reduced physical demands, eliminated unnecessary movements, lowered injury rates and their associated workers' compensation costs, and reduced employee turnover. In many cases, work efficiency and productivity have increased as well. Simple, low-cost solutions are often available to solve problems. Use the information on this page to see what has worked for others in your industry or in other industries.

Overview of Controls for MSD Hazards

To reduce the chance of injury, work tasks should be designed to limit exposure to ergonomic risk factors. Engineering controls are the most desirable, where possible. Administrative or work practice controls may be appropriate in some cases where engineering controls cannot be implemented or when different procedures are needed after implementation of the new engineering controls. Personal protection solutions have only limited effectiveness when dealing with ergonomic hazards.

Type of Control

Workplace Examples

Engineering Controls (implement physical change to the workplace, which eliminates/reduces the hazard on the job/task)

- Use a device to lift and reposition heavy objects to limit force exertion
- Reduce the weight of a load to limit force exertion
- Reposition a work table to eliminate a long/excessive reach and enable working in neutral postures
- Use diverging conveyors off a main line so that tasks are less repetitive
- Install diverters on conveyors to direct materials toward the worker to eliminate excessive leaning or reaching
- Redesign tools to enable neutral postures

Administrative and Work Practice Controls (establish efficient processes or procedures)

- Require that heavy loads are only lifted by two people to limit force exertion
- Establish systems so workers are rotated away from tasks to minimize the duration of continual exertion, repetitive motions, and awkward postures. Design a job rotation system in which employees rotate between jobs that use different muscle groups
- Staff "floaters" to provide periodic breaks between scheduled breaks

- Properly use and maintain pneumatic and power tools

Personal Protective Equipment (use protection to reduce exposure to ergonomics-related risk factors)

- Use padding to reduce direct contact with hard, sharp, or vibrating surfaces
- Wear good fitting thermal gloves to help with cold conditions while maintaining the ability to grasp items easily.

SAFETY ... IT PAYS



Winter dampness can lead to mold and mildew

Molds are forms of fungi that are found indoors and outdoors. You are exposed to them daily in the air you breathe. Sometimes molds grow excessively inside your workplace and can cause different types of illnesses. Most workers will not be affected by molds. Some workers have symptoms like those of hay fever and the common cold, but they can last for longer periods. Molds can also aggravate asthma. In addition, some people in wet or moldy buildings may have flu-like symptoms. Most health problems are temporary and can be controlled by limiting exposure to molds.

Molds need moisture and a food source (organic material). Molds can be any color, including white, orange, green, brown, or black. Even if you cannot see any molds, you may notice a mildew or earthy smell. They may be found indoors on wet/damp walls, carpets, ceilings, or behind wallpaper, as well as in heating, ventilation, and air

conditioning (HVAC) systems. Indoor moisture leading to the growth of molds and other micro-organisms may come from flooding, leaks, high humidity, and steam.

Symptoms also can indicate that you are exposed to molds at work. If you have symptoms, observe when they occur. They may be work-related if they worsen when you are at work, and disappear or lessen at home or on weekends, or during vacations. The onset of symptoms depends on your individual reaction to molds.

How do I get exposed to molds?

Molds produce seed-like spores that are small enough to travel through the air. You can breathe in spores or come into contact with them. Sometimes molds also produce chemicals called mycotoxins, which are attached to the spores and other parts of the mold. You may be exposed to mycotoxins at the same time you are exposed to molds.

Mycotoxins are produced only under certain environmental conditions.

How can molds affect my health?

Molds can cause allergic reactions, fungal infections, and other health effects. Most workers, however, will have no reaction at all when exposed to molds. Some workers have underlying health conditions that make them more sensitive to effects of mold exposure.

Allergic reactions, similar to common pollen or animal allergies, are the most common health effects of molds. Allergic and toxic illnesses can be treated by getting rid of the mold exposure. Your doctor may also prescribe medication to control symptoms.

In almost all cases of allergic or other illnesses, the symptoms are temporary. However, a small percentage of people may experience longer recovery times.

Fungal infections of internal organs are rare. They require immediate medical attention and treatment.

The symptoms described for mold exposure can also be due to other causes such as bacterial or viral infections, or other allergies. Therefore, it is important to tell your doctor if you are concerned about exposure to molds. If possible, have your doctor refer you to, or consult with, an occupational medicine physician to help determine if the illness is work-related. An occupational medicine physician can also help identify other workplace conditions that could be related to your symptoms.

What do I do about molds in the workplace?

There are no standards to say how

OSHA CORNER

Please visit the following address on the web to download helpful safety posters, guides and pamphlets for a safer workplace.

<https://www.osha.gov/publications>



Please see MOLD, page 8

Mold: All types of mold should be removed

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Much mold is hazardous to your health. There should not be visible mold growth or strong moldy odors in the workplace.

Report mold problems. If you see or smell mold, or if you or others are experiencing mold-related symptoms, report it so the problem can be investigated. Find out whether co-workers are experiencing any of the listed symptoms. See if a particular office, floor, or area is affected. Your workplace Injury and Illness Prevention Plan (Title 8, California Code of Regulations, Section 3203) must describe a procedure for employees to report hazards to the employer. Your employer must correct uncontrolled indoor accumulation of water that may cause mold. Cal/OSHA enforces these regulations.

If you have symptoms, see a doctor. If possible, go to an occupational health clinic. If your illness is work-related, your doctor may recommend your removal from the workplace and you may be eligible for workers' compensation benefits. Make sure your doctor fills out a Doctor's First Report of Occupational Injury or Illness (DFR), a form necessary for a successful claim.

Clean up mold contamination. Mold should be removed right away. No one with symptoms, or with a higher likelihood of mold-related illness, should participate in mold removal.

Focus on fixing the problem, not testing for mold. A thorough investigation should reveal all sources of mold and moisture. Environmental sampling is usually unnecessary, since all types of molds should be eliminated.

Scrub hard surfaces (tile, concrete, vinyl, undamaged wood) with ordinary household cleaning products. Bleach is

not necessary. Use waterproof gloves.

Moldy porous materials (carpet, ceiling tile, wallboard, softened wood) usually require removal and replacement. For extensive removal jobs (greater than 30 square feet), use a contractor specializing in this kind of work. There is no state license specifically for mold removal or cleanup.

Ensure that workers who remove moldy materials use gloves, eye protection, coveralls, head and shoe covers, and properly fitted respirators. See the recommended respiratory protection program (Title 8, California Code of Regulations, Section 5144). Choose N-95 respirators (not dust masks) in most situations. Make sure mold removal workers are trained about dust control methods, use of personal protective equipment, and health risks.

Avoid using toxic chemicals. Fungicides and disinfectants are rarely appropriate, and may endanger building occupants. Don't use ozone generators; ozone can harm your lungs. Mold-resistant paints may contain toxic additives. No chemical can substitute for regular cleaning.

The highest exposure to mold often occurs during cleanup. You may need to temporarily leave work areas where cleanup is occurring, especially if you have symptoms or underlying medical conditions that increase your risk of mold-related illnesses.

Eliminate and control the source of moisture. As long as moisture is present the mold will return, so the source of the moisture must be eliminated and the building properly maintained.

Monitor symptoms after cleanup. If the symptoms persist after cleanup, they may not be related to molds, or the cleanup effort was unsuccessful. You and your doctor should explore other possible

causes of illness. If there are other indoor air quality problems or the cleanup was not adequate, your employer may need professional assistance.

Health effects of mold exposure

Health effects of exposure include allergic rhinitis or sinusitis, dermatitis, and asthma. Other reported symptoms in damp buildings include fatigue, headache, fever, muscle ache, difficulty concentrating and mood changes.

Workers with a higher likelihood of mold-related illness include those who have other allergies, have existing respiratory conditions including asthma or other lung diseases, are elderly, or are immunocompromised.

What about Stachybotrys?

Stachybotrys chartarum (also known as Stachybotrys atra) is a greenish-black mold that grows on materials with high cellulose content (drywall, wood and paper, and dropped ceiling tiles). This mold, like some other molds, produces chemicals called mycotoxins under certain environmental conditions. Not all black molds are Stachybotrys, and not all Stachybotrys produces mycotoxins. All indoor molds are potential health hazards and need to be cleaned up.

Cal/OSHA can cite an employer for unsanitary conditions, including uncontrolled water accumulation, that may promote mold growth; see www.dir.ca.gov/title8/3362.html. Employees who need information on workplace health and safety regulations, or who want to file a complaint, should call the nearest district office of Cal/OSHA.

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