

# Q&A

with dr. lisa sullivan

**L**ow pollen time in Chicago runs from July to mid-August, allowing most allergy sufferers a chance to recoup before hay fever season. But mold counts are less predictable and can vary greatly each day. Certain dry molds can be extremely high in the late summer and have been linked to sudden attacks of allergy and asthma symptoms.

**How can I avoid the summer mold?**

Keep it outside. Molds can survive indoors for years. Unlike the wet molds we all know and love (black-green fuzzies on food, murky water, under leaves, or on bathroom tiles), summer molds become problematic on hot, dry, windy days. They behave like pollen, becoming airborne and are easily inhaled.

Summer molds can travel for miles, so installing a HEPA air purifier and keeping the windows closed on high mold-count days will help, in addition to maintaining the indoor humidity between 35-45%. Also, carpeting can greatly increase indoor mold counts, so if you can't get rid of it, upgrade your vacuum cleaner to include HEPA technology for better allergen removal.

**Why do some days bother me more than others?**

Allergies are additive, and it depends on your tolerance. I like to use a metaphor called "the bucket of tolerance" to explain allergies and asthma. Everyone has a different sized bucket, which corresponds to their tolerance level before they begin to feel symptoms. Allergens are one of the many triggers that will fill the bucket during the day. Some people

have a small bucket and only a few triggers will overflow it. Others have a large bucket and can tolerate much more, but they will even have bad days. Knowing your triggers (be it allergens, fumes, weather, exercise) and what might potentially fill your bucket is key to staying ahead.

**Why are my medications no longer working?**

If your allergy and asthma medications were helping in the past, they are still doing their best. It's likely that your bucket is overflowing and medications will only help to a degree. Discuss your situation with your doctor and consider a referral to a board-certified allergist to identify your triggers. Many times, identifying your triggers allows you to anticipate bad days and use medications more effectively. It may also allow you to decrease the amount of medications you need.

**Can allergy shots cure me?**

Immunotherapy works to increase the size of your bucket. Unfortunately, a series of shots (typically three – five years) will not cure you, but it will greatly increase your tolerance for your allergic triggers. With a larger bucket, these individuals generally need less medication, finding their asthma is easier to control. The effect can last five–10 years (or more) but will likely need to be repeated.

*Contributed by Lisa Sullivan, MD of Highland Park, specializing in allergy, asthma and immunology for all ages. Lisasullivanmd.com.*

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### Elementary, My Dear Watson

**T**here has been a lot of chatter about 59-year-old Tom Watson's amazing run at this year's British Open. And let me be clear, Watson's run was nothing short of amazing.

He was an 8-foot putt away from winning the major before coming up short to Stewart Cink in a four-hole playoff.

And while this was an incredible attempt, commentators stated that if he had won the tournament it would have

been the greatest achievement in sports history.

That is flat out wrong. Granted it would have been incredible to see Watson win the Open, keep in mind that other old-timers have had similar achievements this year alone. 46-year-old Chris Chelios came one game away from having his name engraved on Lord Stanley's cup for the second year in a row. Jamie Moyer, 46, did in fact win the World Series with the Phillies.

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