
Dust Mite Allergy

What are dust mites?

Dust mites are tiny animals that you cannot see. They live in pillows, blankets, carpets and soft materials around the house. They eat dead skin that all people shed each day. For this reason, they are also called house dust mites.

What is a dust allergy?

After a dust mite eats, it gives off waste. A dust allergy means you are sensitive or allergic to the waste of dust mites. This is a common cause of eye irritation, nose symptoms and asthma.

How can I control the dust mites around the home?

Dust mites like to live in the dark and need about 50% humidity to live. They like warm, dark places. The best way to reduce dust mite exposure is to focus on the bedroom.

In the bedroom . . .

- The most effective way to reduce dust mite exposure is to cover all mattresses and pillows in zippered allergen barrier covers. Breathable covers made from microfibre or special barriers are more comfortable than those made from vinyl or plastic.
- Wash all blankets and sheets in hot water every 2 weeks to kill live mites. You may decide to buy special comforters that have a barrier against allergens. They do not need to be washed often.

- Remove all items that collect dust on the bed such as stuffed toys and throw pillows. Remove any items that collect dust in the bedroom such as fabric furniture and wall hangings. Wash plastic toys and items with hot water regularly.
- Remove the carpet. Carpets are a source of mites in any room. A floor that can be wiped such as hardwood or vinyl is best. If you keep the carpet, use a dry carpet, cleaning product. Shampooing the carpet can increase dust mite growth.
- Clean the floor, woodwork, walls and ceilings with a damp cloth. Use products such as Endust™ that make dust stick to the mop or cloth. Try not to use a dry mop or dry duster in the bedroom. If there is no carpet, do not use a vacuum cleaner. Vacuums may spread dust.
- Remove curtains from the bedroom and replace with blinds or shades that can be wiped. If you keep curtains in the room, clean them every 2 months.
- Do not use vaporizers or humidifiers in the bedroom. The greater the humidity, the greater the growth of dust mites. A humidifier maintaining 30% to 50% humidity in the house in the winter is all you need. If you use a floor-type humidifier, add an anti-mold solution.
- Hot air systems circulate dust, mold and animal dander throughout the house. If the room is heated by hot air, close and seal the vent or place an allergen filter on the vent. It is better to use a disposable anti-allergen filter in the furnace such as a 3M Filtrate. Change or wash the furnace filter each month or follow the directions that come with the allergen filter.
- During cold weather, heat the bedroom with an electric baseboard heater unless you have hot water or steam heat. Be sure that the heater is safe and will not burn or electrocute anyone.

In the rest of the house

- Follow the same guidelines in the bedroom for any room in the house that the allergic person spends time in such as the TV room.
- To remove dust from the carpets and sofas, vacuum once a week.
- It is best to have the allergic person out of the house or in the kitchen while this is being done. Living rooms are often very dusty. The allergic person may feel better spending more time in other rooms.
- Use a good quality vacuum cleaner, high filtration bags or a double bag. Central vacuum systems are excellent as they vent out of the house.
- Dust and animal dander collects in hot air ducts, then travel from the furnace to all parts of the house. There are companies that clean ducts out well. We are not sure whether this cleaning really helps to decrease symptoms from dust allergy.
- If the person is allergic to a pet, remove the pet from the house. Animals add to the growth of house dust mites. If you must have a pet, keep it out of the bedroom. Keeping an animal outdoors is all right.
- If you will not remove a cat from the house, you need to wash the cat once a month. You can review the **When you are allergic to cats** information handout.
- Keep the laundry room, furnace room and TV area well cleaned. Dryers should be vented to the outside to reduce the dust indoors.
- If you plan to live in an apartment, pick one that is not in the basement.

Air Cleaners . . .

- Air cleaners do not likely help so you do not have to get one.
- Air cleaners do not replace other methods to remove dust mite or other things from the house that cause problems such as cigarette smoke or an animal.
- Small tabletop air cleaners are probably useless.
- Dirty plates on an electrostatic air cleaner seem to give off ozone that can aggravate breathing troubles.