

Allergy Clinic, P.A.

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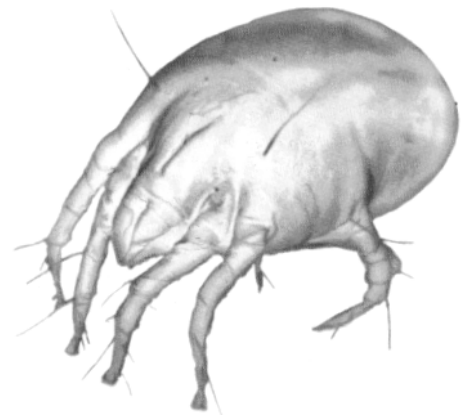
Diplomates of American Board of Allergy and Immunology

HOUSE DUST MITE ALLERGY

House dust is an important cause of allergy symptoms. Reducing one's exposure to house dust can decrease or eliminate these symptoms. The following suggestions will help you achieve a more dust free environment.

What is house dust?

Although there are many components in house dust that can cause allergy, the most important component is the dust mite. This is a very small, insect-like creature. In fact, it is so small that it can be seen only under a microscope. Dust mites live in homes, primarily in mattresses, carpets, and upholstered furniture, and these mites love humid, warm weather. Their diet consists of shed scales from human skin. Aside from mite bodies, their waste products also form a main component in house dust to which allergic people react. This is why even after the mites themselves may have died, their fecal particles can continue to cause allergy to occur.



Where do dust mites live?

The greatest source of dust mite exposure is in the bedroom mattress, as this provides the best conditions of warmth, humidity, and food for their growth. Mites are also present in pillows, blankets, rugs, and carpeting, upholstered furniture, and on curtain and similar fabrics. Female mites can lay twenty-five to fifty eggs, resulting in a new generation being produced every three weeks. Thus it is easy to see why mattresses contain a large number of living and dead dust mites.

What can be done to control dust mites?

Various studies have definitely shown that by taking steps to minimize dust mite exposure in the bedroom, there will be a reduction in allergy symptoms and a decrease in medication requirements. The reason the bedroom is to be emphasized is that people spend one-third or more of every twenty-four hours there, and because it is the room with the greatest number of dust mites.

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Dust Control in the Bedroom

1. Mattresses should be enclosed in zippered plastic or allergy-proof covers. Plastic mattress encasing may be covered with a washable, quilted mattress pad for comfort, but the quilted pad must be washed at least once monthly in hot water.
2. Use polyester fiberfill pillows (no kapok, foam rubber, or feather pillows)
3. Sheets should be washed weekly in hot water. All other bedding including the blankets and pillows should also be washed in hot water (greater than 130 degrees F) at least once monthly; avoid wool, down or any non-washable bedding.
4. Keep all clothing in a closet with the door shut.
5. Avoid heavy curtains, and if possible use window shades instead of venetian blinds; if curtains are used, they should be laundered frequently.
6. Upholstered furniture should be eliminated if at all possible; plain wood or plastic chairs should be used.
7. HEPA type air cleaners can remove airborne dust particles; inexpensive tabletop models are not effective. You should measure the bedroom prior to purchasing the HEPA air cleaner, and buy a model designed to clean a room that size.
8. Air conditioners can prevent the high heat and humidity, which stimulate mite growth. The heating/air conditioning filters should be cleaned monthly. If a humidifier is used in the winter, over-humidification should be avoided. Mites grow best at 75%-80% relative humidity, and they cannot live at a level below 50%. If a control gauge is available, the relative humidity should be maintained between 40-50%.
9. Hot air vents should be covered with filters or the vents should be closed altogether, and an electric radiator should be used in their place.
10. Eliminate wall pennants, knickknacks, stuffed animals, and other dust collectors such as books, magazines, and a bookcase should not be in the bedroom at all.
11. House cleaning, especially "spring cleaning", should be done by someone other than the allergic individual. If that person does the cleaning, he or she should wear a mask while doing so and leave the house (room) for thirty minutes while airborne dust settles.
12. All carpeting should be removed if possible. Floors should be wood, tile, or vinyl. Washable area rugs are acceptable. If carpeting is present, thorough vacuuming is recommended. This is essential to remove accumulated surface dust even though the vacuuming of carpets is not effective for removing live mites.