

Dust Allergies:

Overview

Home is supposed to be a comforting oasis, but for people with dust allergies the home can trigger uncomfortable symptoms. Oddly enough, allergy symptoms often worsen during or immediately after vacuuming, sweeping and dusting. The process of cleaning can stir up dust particles, making them easier to inhale.

People with dust mite allergies often suffer the most inside their homes or in other people's homes. Dust mites are tiny organisms that can barely be seen by the naked eye. They feed off house dust and the moisture in the air. They are one of the most common indoor allergens, and symptoms can be present year-round. In addition to allergic rhinitis, dust mite allergy can also trigger asthma and cause eczema to flare.

Dust Allergy Symptoms

- Sneezing
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Red, itchy or teary eyes
- Wheezing, coughing, tightness in the chest and shortness of breath
- Itching

Dust Allergy Triggers

- Dust mites
- Cockroaches
- Mold
- Pollen
- Pet hair, fur or feathers

Dust Mite Allergy Management and Treatment

Make changes to your home and to your routine:

- Remove wall-to-wall carpets, curtains, and drapes particularly in the bedroom.
- Keep pets out of the bedroom, and preferably out of the house.
- Minimize household humidity.
- Use "mite-proof" cases on mattresses and pillows; wash bed linens in hot water.
- Wear a mask when cleaning.
- Keep the relative humidity in your home less than 50%



Triggers

- **Dust mites.** Dust mites – sometimes called bed mites – are the most common cause of allergy from house dust. Dust mites live and multiply easily in warm, humid places. They prefer temperatures at or above 70 degrees Fahrenheit with humidity of 75 to 80 percent. They die when the humidity falls below 50 percent. They are not usually found in dry climates. Dust mite particles are often found in pillows, mattresses, carpeting and upholstered furniture. They float into the air when anyone vacuums, walks on a carpet or disturbs bedding and they settle once the disturbance is over. Dust mites are a common cause of asthma in children. A house does not need to be visibly dirty to trigger a dust mite allergy reaction. The particles are too tiny to be seen and often cannot be removed using normal cleaning procedures. In fact, a vigorous cleaning can make an allergic person's symptoms worse.
- **Cockroaches.** Cockroaches live in all types of buildings and neighborhoods. Some people develop allergy symptoms when they are around cockroaches. Tiny particles from the cockroach are a common component of household dust and may be the true cause of a dust allergy.
- **Mold.** Mold is a fungus that makes spores that float in the air. When people with a mold allergy inhale the spores, they get allergy symptoms. There are many different kinds of mold—some kinds you can see, others you can't. Molds live everywhere—on logs and on fallen leaves, and in moist places like bathrooms and kitchens. Tiny mold particles and spores are a common component of household dust and may be the true cause of a dust allergy.
- **Pollen.** Pollen comes from trees, grasses, flowers and weeds. People can be allergic to different types of pollen. For instance, some people are allergic to pollen from only beech trees; others are allergic to pollen from only certain kinds of grasses. Pollen is a common component of household dust and may be the true cause of a dust allergy.
- **Animal hair, fur and feathers.** Pets can cause problems for allergic patients in several ways. Their dander (skin flakes), saliva and urine can cause an allergic reaction, especially when combined with household dust. In households with birds, feathers and bird droppings can also become embedded in household dust and cause problems for people who are allergic to them.

After a dust allergy is identified, your doctor will recommend one or more of the following treatments:

Management

To manage a dust allergy, it's best to avoid the things most likely to cause an allergic reaction. Here are some simple steps to reduce exposure to indoor dust:

- Opt for wood flooring over wall-to-wall carpets when possible, especially in bedrooms. Clean your house regularly, using a central vacuum or a vacuum with a HEPA filter. If you are allergic, wear an N95 filter mask while dusting, sweeping or vacuuming. (It can take more than two hours for the dust to settle after a thorough cleaning—so, if possible, clean when the allergic patient is away, and avoid cleaning the bedroom of an allergic person at night.)
Use “mite-proof” cases on your mattresses and pillows. Wash all bed linens regularly, using hot water.
- Keep a HEPA air cleaner running in the allergic person's bedroom.
- Keep pets out of the allergic person's bedroom at all times.
- Keep all unrefrigerated food covered; dispose of food waste in a tightly sealed garbage can.
- If cockroaches are a known problem, use roach traps and schedule regular visits by a professional pest control service.
- Install a high-efficiency media filter with a MERV rating of 11 or 12 in the furnace and the air conditioning unit or a HEPA filter. Leave the fan on to create a “whole house” air filter that removes particulates. Change the filter at least every three months (with the change of the seasons) to keep the air clean year-round. Have your heating and air conditioning units inspected and serviced every six months.
- Get in the habit of using a hygrometer to measure the humidity in your home; keep the humidity level below 55 percent. If you live in a humid or sticky climate, you may find it helpful to use a dehumidifier. You may use a vent fan for removing moisture in bathrooms and the kitchen. Repairing all water leaks will also help keep moisture away.

Medications

- Allergy shots (subcutaneous immunotherapy)
- Tablets (oral immunotherapy)
- Changes to your household routine