

House Dust and House Dust Mite Allergy

Dust mites are known by their scientific name *Dermatophagoides pteronyssinus*. Although we cannot see them because of their microscopic size, we all have literally millions of them in the cloth and porous surfaces in our homes, such as pillows, mattresses, carpets, upholstered furniture, and stuffed animals. They eat shed scales from human skin (each of us produces over a gram per day), but they are not picky eaters. They also love animal dander and feather/down pillows. The average mattress contains over two million of these nasty creatures. Our bedroom is responsible for over 90% of our exposure to house dust mites.

It is nearly impossible to completely exterminate dust mites, but there are a number of highly effective things we can do to reduce our exposure, especially in our bedrooms:

1. Encase pillows, mattresses, and box springs in allergen-impermeable encasings. I recommend trying vinyl covers for the mattress and box springs; they are inexpensive and never need to be removed or washed. For comfort cover the vinyl mattress cover with a mattress pad and sheet. Encase the mattress immediately upon purchase; it only takes a few months for dust mites to begin to accumulate.
2. Encase the pillow with an allergen-impermeable/"dust mite-proof" encasing. Here I recommend the soft, cloth-like encasings available at bed and bath stores and local discount stores.
3. Wash all the bedding including sheets, pillow cases, mattress pads and comforters regularly (every 1 to 2 weeks).
4. Minimize dust collectors in the bedroom and on the beds, such as heavy drapes, throw pillows, stuffed animals, piles of books or magazines, and dust ruffles.
5. Wear a dust mask when you vacuum or dust. Consider a vacuum with a HEPA filter.
6. Keep humidity in the ideal range, 40 to 50%. Do not use room humidifiers or vaporizers as these can over-humidify the air and increase dust mites.
7. Non-porous flooring such as hardwood, wood laminate, tile, or linoleum are preferable to carpet.

Pet Allergy

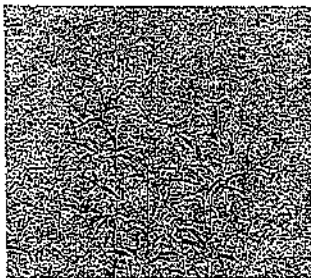
Household pets are for many allergy sufferers, a major problem. Pets, not only dogs and cats, but also rodents, rabbits, and birds are often the major allergen driving a patient's year-round allergy symptoms. In addition, they can "prime" a person's allergies, making their spring or fall pollen season worse than it would have been otherwise.

It is important to remember that there is no such thing as a "hypoallergenic" or non-allergenic dog or cat. Most animal allergen comes from the dander, the skin flakes, of the pet, not the hair or fur. So a short haired cat or dog can be just as bad as a long-haired one. And an allergy sufferer may not notice "problems when I'm around my cat," because the allergen exposure is constant, even on his or her clothes at work or school.

Minimizing exposure to animal allergen is key to the person allergic to animals:

1. The treatment of choice for animal allergy is to not have an animal. This could mean finding a new home for the pet, or refraining from replacing the pet after its death.
2. Keeping the pet outdoors is the next best thing to suggestion 1.
3. Never allow the pet into the bedroom of the allergic individual. If you have more than one story in your house or condo, let gravity work for you by keeping the pet off of the floor where the bedroom is.
4. Do all of the suggestions listed above under house dust allergy.
5. Keep the bedroom door closed to keep the pet out, but also to keep pet dander from drifting into the bedroom.
6. Bathe the pet regularly, preferably every week, to wash away dander that would otherwise have become airborne.
7. Consider use of a HEPA filter in the bedroom to reduce airborne animal allergen particles.

Pollen Allergy



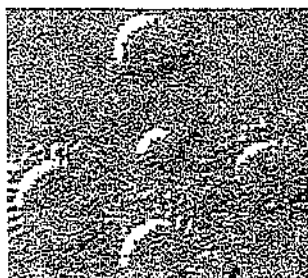
Pollen allergy is the primary cause of seasonal allergic rhinitis, although mold is present in the outdoor air at the same times of year. The single most important measure to minimize pollen exposure is to keep the windows closed and use air conditioning during the warm weather months.

Tree pollen is in the air in the Spring months, often beginning in late February with maple, elm, and juniper (red cedar) and extending through March and April into May. The yellow or green dust we see on our cars in the Spring is tree pollen.

Grass pollen is present when grasses pollinate in the late Spring and early Summer, approximately from May 15th to July 15th. Cutting the grass stirs up grass pollen, particularly when the ground is dry.

Ragweed and other weeds pollinate in the late Summer & Fall, from August 15th through the first frost. This is also the time of year of the highest mold counts.

Mold Allergy



Molds are organisms that propagate by forming microscopic spores that become airborne. Other names for molds include fungi and mildew. There are both outdoor and indoor sources of mold spores, so measure to avoid both indoor and outdoor mold should be undertaken.

Mold spores are present in the air in this area from Spring through the Summer until the hard frost in the late Fall, with highest counts in the late Summer and Fall. Keeping windows closed throughout the warm weather months, including in mild weather in the Spring and Fall, is the most effective measure to avoid outdoor mold.

Fallen leaves, grass clippings, and compost piles, all being dead vegetation, support heavy mold growth. Raking leaves or cutting grass are not a good idea for the mold-allergic patient. If one must do these activities, wearing a mask and taking an antihistamine before these activities may help minimize symptoms.

All damp, musty-smelling areas are sources of mold exposure. Examples would include damp basements, barns, cabins, and caves. Basements, even if they seem dry will generally contain more mold than an upstairs room of the same house. Basements are therefore not good locations for bedrooms of mold-allergic patients. A dehumidifier in the basement can help retard mold growth by keeping the air drier. Mold-retarding paints and paint additives are available at hardware stores to reduce mold growth on basement walls.

In the home, furniture, pillows, mattresses and stuffed toys are potential sources of mold. Feather and foam rubber pillows should especially be avoided since both tend to support mold growth. Even polyester pillows, however, should be encased in dust-proof covers. Molds can be found in rubber door gaskets and drip trays of refrigerators, in shower stalls, or on damp walls and ceilings. Various mold-killing products, generally containing bleach, are available to clean these surfaces.

Vaporizers or room humidifiers should not be used long-term (for weeks or months) for two reasons. First, the vaporizer itself can become contaminated with mold, and, secondly, the room can become overly humid and this can encourage mold growth. Short-term use (a few days) of a vaporizer is acceptable if the device is emptied and dried out daily and cleaned every couple of days with dilute bleach. An efficient furnace humidifier (without a reservoir) is often helpful to the allergic patient in the Winter and generally will not increase mold growth. Ideal humidity is 30 - 45%.

Air conditioning helps the patient both filtering mold from the air and by dehumidifying the indoor air. Air conditioning should continue from the Spring through the late Fall.