



Dust Mite Allergy

Unlike pollen allergies, house dust mite allergy can affect all year, causing symptoms like rhinoconjunctivitis, asthma, and dermatitis. Studies indicate that nearly 1 in 3 people may be allergic to dust mites.

THE CAUSE

Tiny 8-legged creatures called dust mites seem to be the major cause of allergic reactions in house dust. House dust mites survive on shed human skin scales. As these mites digest their food, they produce potent allergens which are released in their fecal pellets (droppings). Inhaling these microscopic pellets and mite bodies themselves provokes allergic symptoms such as nasal congestion, itching, watery eyes, sneezing and asthma.

WHERE DUST MITES LIVE

Because house dust mites feed on shed human skin scales, mattresses and pillows are ideal places for mite infestations and have the highest levels of mite allergens. House dust mites thrive in warm, humid environments. They prefer temperatures at or above 70 degrees. Wall-to-wall carpeting, central heating, bedding, upholstered furniture, wallpaper or even stuffed toys provide ideal conditions for dust mites. Although mattresses and bed covers at home are the major source of mite allergens, mite-allergic patients are also exposed to significant mite allergens in public places such as schools, movie theaters and public transportation.

DUST MITE AVOIDANCE

- Use only synthetic polyester-fill pillows and comforters (never feather or down). Encase pillows, mattresses, and box springs in zippered dust mite-proof covers (available at allergy-supply stores and many department and discount stores). Keep covers clean by vacuuming or wiping them down once a week.
- Pillows should be changed yearly. Mattress should be changed every 5-8 years.
- Wash sheets and blankets once a week in very hot water (130° Fahrenheit or higher) to kill dust mites.
- Avoid upholstered furniture, window mini blinds, and carpeting in the house. They can collect dust and harbor dust mites (especially carpets).
- Use washable throw rugs on vinyl or hardwood floors, and wash rugs in hot water weekly.
- Use washable curtains and vinyl window shades that can be wiped down. Wash curtains in hot water weekly.
- Dust and vacuum weekly. If possible, use a vacuum cleaner with a HEPA (High-Efficiency Particulate) filter to collect and trap dust mites.
- Reduce the number of dust collecting houseplants, books, knick-knacks, and non-washable stuffed animals.
- Remove all stuffed animals from your child's bed. Only a few washable stuffed animals should be allowed in your child's room, and these should be washed weekly or put in the freezer overnight in a ziplock bag to kill the dust mites.
- Avoid humidifiers when possible because moist air promotes dust mite infestation. Humidity in the air should stay below 50%. The amount of humidity in a room can be easily checked with a humidity gauge (hygrometer) that can be purchased in most hardware and home improvement stores.