

DUST MITE ALLERGY

Dust mite allergy is an immune system reaction to a certain dust mite protein. This reaction triggers inflammation in the lining of the nasal passages (allergic rhinitis), causing sneezing, runny nose and other signs and symptoms associated with hay fever.

For some people, dust mite allergy may be the primary cause of inflammation and contraction of airways of the lungs (asthma), resulting in wheezing, shortness of breath and other breathing difficulties.

Dust mites, relatives of the spider, are too small to see without a microscope. Dust mites eat skin cells shed by people, and they thrive in warm, humid environments. In most homes, bedding, upholstered furniture and carpeting provide an ideal environment for dust mites.

Steps to reduce the number of dust mites in your home can often control dust mite allergy. Medications or other treatments may be necessary to relieve symptoms and manage asthma.

Lifestyle and home remedies

By Mayo Clinic staff – reviewed and edited by Dr. Magaletti

Avoiding exposure to dust mites is the best strategy for controlling dust mite allergy. While you can't completely eliminate dust mites from your home, you can significantly reduce their number. Use these suggestions:

- **Use allergen-proof bed covers.** Cover your mattress and pillows in dust-proof or allergen-blocking covers. These covers, made of either **vinyl** or tightly woven fabric, prevent dust mites from colonizing the mattress or pillows. Encase box springs in vinyl or plastic covers. If you are using a vinyl cover – wash them off each week with the hottest water possible to remove the mites.
- **Wash bedding weekly.** Wash all sheets, blankets, pillowcases and bedcovers in hot water that is at least 130 F (54.4 C) to kill dust mites and remove allergens. If bedding can't be washed hot, put the items in the drier for at least 20 minutes at a temperature above 130 F (54.4 C) to kill the mites. Then wash and dry the bedding to remove allergens. Freezing non-washable items for 24 hours also can kill dust mites, but this won't remove the allergens.
- **Keep humidity low.** Maintain a relative humidity between 30 and 50 percent in your home. A dehumidifier or air conditioner can help keep humidity low, and a hygrometer (available at hardware stores) can measure humidity levels.
- **Choose bedding wisely.** Avoid wool or down bedcovers that trap dust easily and are difficult to clean frequently.

- **Buy washable stuffed toys.** Wash them often in hot water and dry thoroughly. Also, keep stuffed toys off beds. Limit the number of stuff animals per room to 2 or less – “they” should live in another room in the house.
- **Remove dust.** Use a damp or oiled mop or rag rather than dry materials to clean up dust. This prevents dust from becoming airborne and resettling. Damp dust every week.
- **Vacuum regularly.** Vacuuming carpeting and upholstered furniture removes surface dust — essentially the dust mites' food supply — but vacuuming isn't effective at removing most dust mites and dust mite allergens. Use a vacuum cleaner with a double-layered micro filter bag or a high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter to help decrease house-dust emissions from the cleaner. If your allergies are severe, leave the area being vacuumed while someone else does the dirty work. Stay out of the vacuumed room for 20 minutes after vacuuming.
- **Cut clutter.** If it collects dust, it also collects dust mites. Remove knickknacks, tabletop ornaments, books, magazines and newspapers from your bedroom.
- **Remove carpeting and other dust mite habitats.** Carpeting provides a comfortable habitat for dust mites. This is especially true if carpeting is over concrete, which holds moisture easily and provides a humid environment for mites. If possible, replace wall-to-wall bedroom carpeting with tile, wood, linoleum or vinyl flooring. Consider replacing other dust-collecting furnishings in bedrooms, such upholstered furniture, non-washable curtains and horizontal blinds.
- **Pets.** May not sleep in the bedroom.