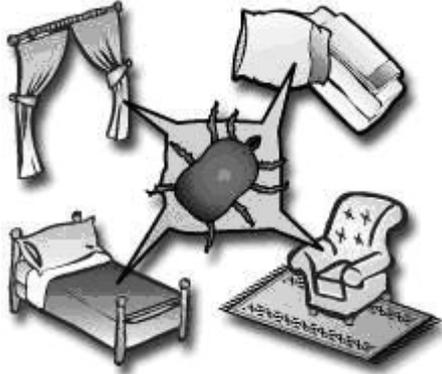


# Dust Mite Allergy



House dust contains microscopic mites. Dust mites are tiny *microscopic* (can't be seen with the naked eye) relatives of the spider. They live on mattresses, bedding, upholstered furniture, carpets and curtains. They are common causes of a runny nose and can produce symptoms of asthma. These tiny creatures feed on the flakes of skin that people and pets shed daily. They commonly float around in the dust in your home and do not cause a problem for most people.

These mites thrive in summer and die in winter. In a warm, humid house, however, they continue to thrive even in the coldest months. The waste products of dust mites are proteins that may cause an allergic reaction. In the cleanest home dust mites cannot be totally gotten rid of. However, the amount of allergy producing proteins can be reduced.

## PREVENTIVE STRATEGIES

The strategies with the best evidence base are:

- Encase your mattress and pillows in dust-proof or allergen impermeable covers (available from specialty supply mail order companies, bedding and some department stores).
- Wash all bedding and blankets once a week in hot water (at least 130 - 140°F) to kill dust mites. Non-washable bedding can be frozen overnight to kill dust mites.

Other strategies that may help but have less evidence supporting them include:

- Place bedding in direct sunlight once a month. This will kill the dust mites but not remove the allergen completely so it is still necessary to wash bedding regularly.
- Use a dehumidifier or air conditioner to maintain relative humidity at about 50% or below.
- Replace wool or feathered bedding with synthetic materials and traditional stuffed animals with washable ones.
- If possible, replace wall-to-wall carpets in bedrooms with bare floors (linoleum, tile or wood) and remove fabric curtains and upholstered furniture.
- Use a damp mop or rag to remove dust. Never use a dry cloth since this just stirs up mite allergens.
- Use a vacuum cleaner with either a double-layered micro filter bag or a HEPA filter to trap allergens that pass through a vacuum's exhaust.
- Wear a mask while vacuuming to avoid inhaling allergens, and stay out of the vacuumed area for 20 minutes to allow any dust and allergens to settle after vacuuming.



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