



Allergy, Asthma & Sinus Center

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Dust Mite Allergy

Dust mite is a microscopic organism. It is the main allergen of year round allergy sufferers. People allergic to it seem to have worsening symptoms of nasal congestion, postnasal drip and sinus infections starting in the fall when the heating season starts. Mites live in fabric, not hard surfaces. Heat and humidity encourages the proliferation of the mites. Limiting all fabrics such as carpets, upholstered furniture, stuffed animals and fabric window treatments help limit contact with dust mite. Emphasizing hardwood floors, ceramic floors and linoleum all limit exposure to the mite. Cleaning heating ducts does not do much to limit mite exposure. Air purifiers do not filter out the mites, which tend to infest and inhabit fabric. The following measures have been proven to decrease mite exposure.

Helpful Hints to Reduce Dust Mite:

1. Use hypoallergenic, zippered dust mite covers on mattresses, box springs and pillows.
2. Wash all bedding, including pillows, in hot water to kill the mites. Dust mite is retained more in washed polyester sheets than cotton sheets. Bleach in warm water kills 98% of mite vs. 84% in warm water alone. Bleach also destroys animal dander.
3. Keep the bedroom clear of clothing, drapes, towels, etc.
4. Keep chest drawers and closet doors closed.
5. Use air conditioners to lower humidity in warm weather.
6. Regardless of the type of vacuum cleaner, traditional, hepa filtered vacuums, or water filtered vacuums, they all increase the allergen in the air while in use and they do not significantly reduce the amount of allergen in the room. A central vacuum is ideal.
7. Minimize the use of carpeting in the bedroom. Washable throw rugs are better than wall-to-wall carpeting or area rugs.
8. Ionizers do decrease dust mite levels and larger ones do it better. They are not recommended because they produce high levels of ozone in the room and this leads to increased wheezing.

A Word on Carpeting: Carpets tend to offer a shelter for animal dander, mite, molds, rodent droppings and cockroach particles. Limiting carpeting limits exposure to these potent allergens. Wall to wall carpeting offers the maximum exposure to allergen-laden fabric. In addition, it is usually mass-produced using formaldehyde and other glues that cause chemical sensitivities. The very worse situation is wall to wall carpeting placed over a concrete surface. The concrete maximizes moisture retention, which generates the most dust mite and mold growth. Area rugs cover less floor area and are thereby better floor covers. When they are hand knotted, there is no formaldehyde or other glues used in the manufacturing process. Cleaning rugs with chemicals is preferred to steam cleaning. The latter process introduces moisture into the rug, which tends to generate mold and dust mite growth. A rule of thumb is the less carpeting the better.