

Dust Mite Allergy

Prevention

Avoiding exposure to dust mites can minimize your risk of allergic reactions. While you can't completely eliminate dust mites from your home, you can significantly reduce their number. Use these suggestions:

- Build a barrier. Cover your mattress and pillows in dust-proof or allergen-impermeable covers.
- Maintain low humidity in your home. Aim for 30 percent to 50 percent relative humidity. A dehumidifier or air conditioner can help keep humidity low, while a hygrometer (available at hardware stores) can measure humidity levels.
- Choose bedding wisely. Use synthetic materials as opposed to wool or down bedcovers.
- Buy washable stuffed toys. Wash them often in hot water and dry thoroughly. Also keep stuffed toys off beds.
- Wash bedding weekly. Kill dust mites by washing all sheets, blankets, pillowcases and bedcovers in hot water (130 to 140 F). Freeze nonwashable bedding overnight in a chest freezer.
- Remove dust. Use a damp mop or rag instead of a dry cloth.
- Vacuum regularly. Use a vacuum cleaner with a double-layered microfilter bag or a high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter. Vacuum both carpet and fabric-covered furniture. 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. So remove knickknacks, tabletop ornaments, books, magazines and newspapers from your bedroom.
- Rethink flooring. If your dust mite allergy is severe, replace your wall-to-wall bedroom carpet with tile, wood or linoleum flooring. Also consider replacing upholstered furniture and removing fabric curtains.

Though you may be tempted to purchase an air purifier to lessen the symptoms of your dust mite allergy, you should know that air purifiers alone aren't effective for reducing dust mites. This is because dust mites aren't airborne for long periods. When they are sent into the air, they don't stay long; they're too heavy. Vigorous cleaning practices, along with the other tips above, are better bets for minimizing dust mites in your home. For some people, adding an air purifier to the steps described above can reduce the amount of airborne dust.

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