



House Dust Allergy

Allergy

Sensitivity to house dust is one of the most aggravating problems facing those who suffer from year-round allergy symptoms and asthma. House dust is made up of many different things including animal hair and dander, insect fragments, pollen, assorted molds and mold spores, many inert substances, and mites. The house dust mites – *Dermatophagoides pteronyssinus* and *farinae* are responsible for many of the symptoms of year-round allergy.

House Dust Mites

House dust mites are microscopic insects which cannot be seen without a microscope. Mites are present all over the world in homes that are warm and humid and not at high elevations. Mites live in pillows, bedding, mattresses, carpets, upholstered furniture, stuffed animals, and “furry” toys. A main source of food for house dust mites are the shed scales of our skin. House dust mites thrive in the warmth and humidity of our bedding, which holds an ample food supply for these mites and will actually double in weight over ten years. The main cause of allergy is actually not the mite itself but the excrement particles that are left after feeding on our shed skin. Mites require warmth and humidity in order to survive.

Symptoms Include:

- Sneezing at night or upon awakening in the morning.
- Chronic stuffy and/or runny nose in the morning.
- Mouth breathing while asleep.
- Symptoms improve during the day or when outdoors and increasing at night.
- Chronic fatigue, swollen eyes, and nasal congestion that is worse in the morning.
- Worsening of asthma or allergy symptoms at night or in the morning.

Controlling Your Environment

Controlling the environment is the most important step in controlling house dust mite allergy. If we can successfully prevent our exposure to house dust mites, we can dramatically lessen one of the major sources of year-round allergies in our homes. While it is not possible to totally eliminate mites from our environment, we can take an active role and greatly reduce the number that we are exposed to. Controlling mites in the bedroom is the most important step in the process.

The most effective methods of controlling mites are:

- **Encase mattresses and pillows in air-tight allergy proof covers.** These covers can be purchased at various retail stores, through mail order businesses, or through the internet.
- **Keep the humidity low!** Do not use humidifiers in the bedroom and, if you have a humidifier on your furnace, keep the humidity below 50%. This can only be controlled with the use of an accurate *hygrometer*- a device which measures the humidity. Air conditioning should be kept on throughout the summer. A dehumidifier can dramatically help your air conditioning unit control the humidity. It is best to keep these running all day long.
- **Wash all bedding in hot water at least once weekly.** The water temperature should be at least 140 degrees in order to effectively kill the mites.

Other helpful methods to control dust mites include:

- Remove carpeting from the bedroom and replace with tile, hardwood, or linoleum.
- Curtains should be replaced with blinds which can be easily washed.
- Remove stuffed animals and upholstered furniture.
- Chemical treatments applied to carpets or bedding to eliminate dust mites have been found to be of little benefit. While high efficiency air filters are effective at removing pollens and mold spores, they do not remove house dust mites.
- Cleaning should be done by those who do not suffer from dust allergy and vacuum cleaners should have a HEPA filter or "double bags" inside.

Relief is Available

With strict environmental control methods, it often takes months before there are noticeable changes in symptoms. Medications including inhaled nasal steroid sprays and non-sedating antihistamines offer additional relief. Allergy immunotherapy (allergy shots) is sometimes necessary when other methods fail. Although medications have been vastly improved and immunotherapy is now done with standardized mite antigen offering superior results, environmental control methods remain the cornerstone of treatment.

If you have any questions about house dust mites or need information regarding bedding covers or air filters, feel free to ask our staff.