

dust mite allergy

Avoidance is best where possible

WHEN MITE-ALLERGIC INDIVIDUALS MOVE TO MITE-FREE ENVIRONMENTS THEIR ASTHMA, ECZEMA OR ALLERGIC RHINITIS OFTEN IMPROVES DRAMATICALLY.

Such a move is not practical for most people but there are a number of steps that can be taken to reduce exposure to dust mite allergen. This is possible to achieve but difficult to sustain.

Dust mites love humidity

THEY FEED ON MOULD AND THEY FEED ON SKIN FLAKES. THEY CAN DEHYDRATE AND COME TO LIFE AGAIN UNDER HUMID CONDITIONS.

Dust mites live in carpet, mattresses and clothes. They live in the bottom of the carpet and they seem to do best in an undisturbed environment like under the bed and in the drawer where the winter clothes are stored. While you are away on holidays (especially in summer) and the house is closed up they have a free run and can create havoc on your return. Dust mite levels are usually low in school room carpets.



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Ventilation

Any means of reducing the humidity in the house will make it less favourable for house dust mite proliferation.

- BEDROOM WINDOWS** should be kept open where possible (in Spring those with pollens allergies will want them closed).
- ANY MOULD SHOULD BE TREATED** and the cause of the damp removed. Leaks in the roof and in the bathroom should be mended. Check behind beds and cupboards. Trees outside the windows or heavy curtains shade the room and encourage mould and house dust mites.
- EXTRACTION FANS** should always be used in bathrooms and in kitchens.
- CLOTHES DRYERS** should not be inside unless the water is vented outside.
- WASHING** should not be dried indoors.
- HUMIDIFIERS** should *never* be used in bedrooms.
- FISH TANKS** should not be kept in bedrooms.
- AIR CONDITIONERS** can be used to reduce humidity. They need to run continuously to be of any benefit.

Carpets

Ideally flooring should be free of any dust that can become airborne

- THE BEST POSSIBLE SOLUTION** is to remove all carpets especially from bedrooms. In the family home, the absence of carpet and covers on the bedding makes the biggest difference to house dust mite allergen levels.
- LOOSE CARPETS** can be washed with the garden hose, detergent and a broom and dried in the sun
- LAYING CARPETS OUT IN THE SUN FOR 3 HOURS** will kill mites but the allergen (from dead mites and their faecal particles) will still be there.
- CARPETS CAN BE STEAM CLEANED** and this will reduce the levels for 1 to 2 months. The steam cleaning needs to be done with steam not hot water. The hot water wash leaves the carpet damp at the base and provides an ideal environment for house dust mite breeding and feeding etc.
- TREATING CARPETS WITH ANTI-DUST MITE SPRAYS** does not provide any sustained benefit.

Beds

- INFANTS SHOULD HAVE NEW BEDDING** and firmly fitted covers to protect from house dust mite exposure.
- THE BEDS NEED TO BE COVERED** wherever the infant or child is sleeping
- AVOID SHEEPSKIN** and wool underlays.
- CHILDREN SHOULD SLEEP UP *off the floor***. Beds on legs that allow the air to circulate around the mattress are best. Bunk beds are not a good idea as the house dust mite *shower* on to the child in the bed.
- PARENTS' BEDS** need house dust mite protection too. Infants and children with



eczema seem to have more disturbed sleep and spend a lot of time in their parent's bed. Some children come into their parent's room and curl up on the floor or on a mattress beside the bed.

Covers for bedding and hypoallergenic bedding

- SEVERAL BRANDS** of mattress covers are available. Special fabrics are used that allow the fabric to breathe but keep the mites trapped inside are the most comfortable. Mattress covers on all the beds where the child sleeps are necessary for any benefit.
- PILLOWS** can be encased or a new pillow can be purchased. Many pillows can be washed in hot water. All new pillows are *hypoallergenic*. With time house dust mite levels increase. Sweating and mouth breathing increases the moisture content of the pillow and encourages house dust mite activity. Some new pillows have mould inhibitors in the fabric. Tests show that moulds are necessary for house dust mites to survive.
- COTTON OR ACRYLIC BLANKETS** are easiest to look after as they can be washed in hot water. Children with eczema should have fewer covers to keep cool as heat aggravates eczema. Doonas of any sort cause too much overheating.

Washing

All bedding and clothes should be washed in the same manner.

- REGULAR WASHING OF ALL BEDDING EVERY 4 TO 6 WEEKS IS ADVISED**, even for the house dust mite covers.
- STORAGE TIME IN THE DARK** recesses of the cupboard or drawers is breeding time for house dust mites.

hot or cold washing?

- Frequent washing is best. Washing in cold water washes out the allergy protein.
- Soaking in water hotter than 55°C kills mites and inactivates the allergy protein. Hot washes are not necessary for every wash.

fabrics that can't handle the heat

SOAK FOR 30 MINUTES IN:

- 100ml of eucalyptus oil made into a stable emulsion
- with 25 ml of SUNLIGHT liquid dishwashing detergent

NOTES: You will need to fill the washing machine with water first before adding the eucalyptus/detergent mixture. Eucalyptus washes are not suitable for those with sensitive skin or reactions to smells and odours.

Clothes dryers

Clothes dryers get very hot and may help to kill mites. If the bedding is dried on the line, it is useful to dry the sheets off in the dryer before putting them back on the bed especially in winter.



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Freezing soft toys

Popping the toys in a plastic bag in the freezer overnight can help to kill mites. The accumulation of soft toys should be discouraged if the child has eczema or asthma.

Cleaning

Children with eczema shed lots of skin flakes

—Dust using a damp cloth to prevent allergen becoming airborne.

The new antistatic wipes and mops should do a good job

vacuum cleaning

—This removes dust and dirt but it usually doesn't reduce house dust mite levels enough to help reduce allergy symptoms. The vacuum cleaner should have a good filtration system to avoid increases airborne dust particles.

—Those with dust allergies often avoid the task as it provokes symptoms.

This can be a source of allergen build-up in a household.

Clothing

—Upper body clothing is a significant source of house dust mite allergen. This can be a particular problem for small children as they can have a lot of intimate contact with a carer's upper body clothing

—Fabrics that are easy to dry and to care for are best. Cotton clothing is good for eczema but it does take a while to dry

—Outdoor clothing specialists have a lot of easy care clothes that are very warm.

Visiting relatives and friends

—**GRANDPARENTS' HOUSES** often have older carpet, bedding and furnishings and bedding loaded with dust mite particles. Rooms tend to be closed up and not cleaned so often because they are not used much.

—**SLEEPING AT FRIEND'S OR RELATIVE'S HOUSES** You may have to sleep on the floor, the bedding may be taken out of a cupboard, they may have a cat and jumping on beds and pillow fights are common.

—**MAKE SURE YOUR DUST ALLERGIC CHILD** takes an antihistamine and their asthma medication before going and has a reliever with them.

—**IT IS BEST FOR THOSE WITH PROBLEM** dust or animal allergies to take a long-acting non-sedating antihistamine before they go out.

—**WHERE CHILDREN SPEND THEIR TIME BETWEEN 2 HOUSEHOLDS** the beds may be changed after a visit rather than before the next one allowing house dust mite levels to build-up.

