



DUST MITES

They live by the thousands in your bedding, carpet and mattress. They feed on flaked off human skin in bedding, carpet and stuffed furniture. Their droppings are the size of a pollen grain. For those who are not allergic, these microscopic relatives of spiders cause no harm. For the allergy sufferer, they are frequently the main cause of “dust” allergy. Each mite may leave as many as 20 pollen size droppings each day. Each female may lay as many as 50 eggs. New generations are produced every 3 weeks. Their droppings are often a cause of allergy misery, even months after the mite has died. The inhalation of waste products and fragmented mite body parts cause allergy symptoms. Dust mites multiply and thrive in warm humid weather. Their numbers dwindle with the onset of the cooler weather and lower humidity, but the legacy of their products remains. Usually, during the warmer weather, windows are open and fresh air circulates through the house and dilutes the mite allergens. With cooler weather, windows are closed and the heat comes on, re-circulating air in the house. This is when mite sufferers usually notice worsening of their symptoms. Often, as the mite products decay, some individuals will notice some improvement by late winter.

Avoidance Of Dust Mites

All surroundings of the dust mite sensitive patient should be as free from dust of all kinds as much as possible. Most people cannot control exposure to dust during their working or daylight hours, but dust can, to a large extent, be minimized in the bedroom. During the course of 24 hours this is the room in which a patient spends most of their time. While the directions below may seem difficult at first, experience plus habit will make them simple and the results will be well worth the effort.

1. Begin with the bedroom:
 - A. Encase your mattress, box spring, and pillows in zippered allergen impermeable encasings. This will prevent inhalation of dust mite by-products.
 - B. Wash all linens in hot water (135 degrees) on a weekly basis. Hot water kills dust mites. The dryer alone does not accomplish this.
 - C. Remove the bedroom carpet, if possible. Millions of mites live in the carpet and become airborne. Replace the carpet with a wipeable surface, (i.e. hardwood, vinyl or tile). One or two small, washable cotton or synthetic scatter rugs are permissible, but they should be washed weekly.
 - D. Remove all dust mite-gathering items from the bedroom, (i.e. stuffed toys, stuffed furniture, throw pillows).
 - E. Use readily cleanable window treatments that may be washed frequently.
 - F. To prepare the room, it must be completely emptied as though you were moving. Empty and clean all closets and, if at all possible, store contents elsewhere. Your seasonal clothing may be kept in the bedroom closet. Give the floors and woodwork a thorough cleaning and scrubbing to remove all traces of dust.
2. Dust mite avoidance throughout the home:
 - A. If hot air heating is used, adequate filters as well as an electronic air filter may be helpful to minimize dust throughout the house. Patients should check with their furnace company for further details.

- B. Keep the relative humidity less than 40% in your home to help prevent replication of dust mites. Use air conditioning in the summer.
- C. Use a quality vacuum cleaner with high quality filtration bags (HEPA filter preferred).
- D. Care must be taken to keep down dust throughout the entire house. Go over floors and furniture with a vacuum cleaner at frequent intervals. Cleaning must be done preferably while the dust sensitive individual is out of the house. Use a damp or oiled cloth to avoid raising dust. If the patient must be in the house or do the cleaning, a dust mask should be worn.
- E. The patient should be careful not to handle objects covered with dust, such as books, boxes or clothing that have been stored over a long period of time. Avoid attics, basements and closets and, if exposure is unavoidable, wear a dust mask.