

• DUST ALLERGY

What are the symptoms?

Dust mite allergy can cause year-round symptoms and have a significant effect on health and quality of life. It can lead to the following conditions and symptoms in individuals who have developed an allergy to dust mites:

Allergic Rhinitis, with symptoms affecting the **NOSE**

- runny or stuffy nose
- itchy, watery eyes
- poor concentration, headache and sleep disturbances

Eczema, with symptoms affecting the **SKIN**

- itchy skin
- red rash
- small, raised blisters

Asthma, with symptoms affecting the **LUNGS / BREATHING**

- breathing difficulties
- coughing
- wheezing
- chest tightness

Allergic conditions affect millions of people in North America. They can range from being an occasional nuisance to being severe and even life threatening, as in the case of severe asthma. Symptoms will vary from person to person and can affect children as well as adults.

Allergies and asthma are leading causes of absenteeism at work and school and can significantly impact quality of life. Poor diagnosis and under treatment can result in increasing severity and frequent "attacks". While some people will find that allergy symptoms come and go, others are affected year round.

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Dust allergy can provoke symptoms throughout the year, but it may not be

obvious that dust is the underlying cause of symptoms.



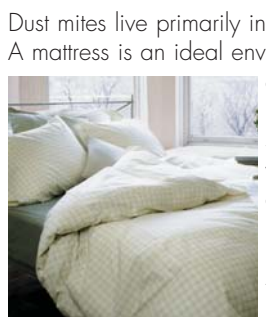
• WHAT ARE DUST MITES?

The dust mite is a microscopic creature of the arachnid (spider) family. It is a multi-legged creature with a furry body, which is a component of household dust. Dust mites are extremely fertile and numerous. Dust mites do not bite, nor do they transmit diseases. However, they can wreak havoc on people who have become sensitive to them. Their tiny size means that they are an almost invisible organism, but they can have very powerful adverse effects on health.



• WHERE ARE DUST MITES TYPICALLY FOUND?

Dust mites prosper in warm, humid and dark environments. They feed on the human and animal skin particles that we and our pets shed on a daily basis. They can lay up to 300 eggs in their brief 80-day lifetime and leave up to 200 times their entire weight in droppings. People allergic to dust mites react to the protein in the mites and their droppings.



Dust mites live primarily in mattresses, pillows and carpets. A mattress is an ideal environment for mites, as it is warm, humid and provides an abundance of the mites' favourite food, i.e., human skin scales. The average bed can be infested with millions of mites. We spend approximately eight hours per day in bed, leading to close and prolonged contact with the harmful fecal pellets of the house dust mite.

Continual exposure to the house dust mite in mattresses and bedding is a major cause of allergy, yet many people are unaware that this is a trigger of their allergies and asthma. A diagnosis can easily be made by an allergist using a simple skin test.

It is estimated that 20-25% of Canadians suffer from allergic rhinitis and 8% of adults and 12% of children suffer from asthma.

• HOW CAN DUST MITE ALLERGY BE CONTROLLED?

The best approach is one of Awareness, Avoidance and Action.

Awareness

Start by getting a professional diagnosis by an allergist to confirm this and any other allergies.

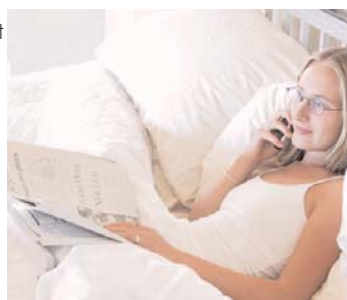
Avoidance

Try to eliminate exposure to dust mites by reducing the amount of dust mite in the home. Avoidance is the first and most important step in reducing symptoms.

Action

If you continue to experience symptoms or have seasonal allergies to airborne substances such as tree pollens and ragweed, ask your doctor about medications.

Medical professionals agree that the best way to avoid the symptoms of dust mite allergies is to create a non-invasive barrier between them and you. Protective mattress, box spring and pillow encasings are an essential tool, allowing you to contain the mites and their harmful allergens.



Only zippered encasings that completely enclose all six sides of the mattress and box spring can be considered dust mite proof.

It will also help if humidity levels in the bedroom can be kept in the range of 30 to 50 per cent since mites thrive on humidity. A hygrometer is an inexpensive device that can be used to measure humidity levels.

• MOLD ALLERGY

Molds are found both indoors and outdoors. Outdoor mold spores may provoke allergies in the spring, summer and fall while indoor molds can cause problems year round. Any house can develop a mold problem given the right conditions.



Like dust mites, molds thrive in humid environments. You might not see it growing on the walls, but it may still be present in your home. Molds require two factors to grow indoors:

1. free moisture that can occur in the form of relative humidity above 50 percent, leakage from pipes or foundations, or any ongoing source of water; and
2. something to grow on. Molds particularly like to grow on wall-board, wood or fabrics, but will grow virtually any place if they are given a chance.

Molds spread by producing spores that can become airborne. These spores can end up in house dust where they grow. Dust from mold-contaminated houses can cause allergy symptoms if a mold-sensitive person inhales it.

• WHAT ABOUT PETS?

Pets provide companionship, security and a sense of comfort to many families. Unfortunately, it is possible to develop allergies to pets and it is impossible to know in advance whether this will occur. People with a family history of allergy and those who have already developed other allergies should be cautious about deciding to acquire a pet.



Pet allergy usually results from sensitivity to pet dander, or skin flakes, as well as their saliva and urine. The hair is not considered to be a very significant allergen. However, the hair or fur can collect pollen, dust, mold and other allergens. A frequent misconception is that shorthaired animals cause fewer problems. It is the dander (skin scales) that causes the most significant allergic reactions - not the length or amount of hair on the pet.

• ALLERGIES IN CLASSROOM

Many children spend seven to 10 hours a day at school and they may be surrounded by symptom-causing triggers hiding inside many school buildings including pollen, dust, chalk, classroom pets, and other irritating substances. The school nurse, teacher and administrators should know what to do in the event of an asthma episode and should have a copy of the child's Asthma Management Plan, but parents can also advocate for allergen-safe classrooms that are cleaned regularly and that are free of carpet, pets, molds and dust.



20 DAY-TO-DAY TIPS THAT WILL KEEP YOU BREATHING EASY

1. Get a professional diagnosis and follow your doctor's instructions.
2. Seal all mattresses, all pillows and box springs in allergen impermeable, non-quilted, zippered encasings. Ask your doctor or patient association about where to buy them.
3. Remove all dust-collecting objects from the bedroom e.g., books and bookcases, ornaments and wall hangings.
4. Remove carpets from the bedroom and use wooden flooring, linoleum or other hard surface.
5. Wash all bed linens (sheets, pillowcases) weekly in hot water (130°F/54.5°C). Cooler wash cycles will not kill the mites.
6. Replace heavy curtains with lightweight/ washable ones that can be washed frequently or, better still, use blinds that can be cleaned weekly.
7. Keep airborne dust to a minimum by using a damp cloth when dusting.
8. Remove upholstered furniture and unnecessary clutter from the bedroom area.
9. Minimize the use of upholstered furniture: vinyl or leather is preferable.
10. Remove stuffed toys from children's bedrooms. If a favourite toy is a must, then chose a washable toy. (Alternatively place the toy in a plastic bag in the freezer till frozen once a week to kill dust mites.)
11. H.E.P.A. air cleaners can help remove airborne allergen particles; however, be sure to choose the appropriate model for your room.
12. Clean the furnace and all air ducts. Also, air ducts can be covered with a filter.
13. Never allow pets in the bedroom.
14. Avoid comforters and chenille bedspreads.
15. Use enclosed bookcases and curio cabinets instead of open shelves.
16. Avoid over humidifying the home. Mites love humidity!
17. If allergic, wear a dust mask when cleaning.
18. Use an air conditioner in summer or screened window ventilators to keep out dust and pollens.
19. Vacuum the dust proof encasings regularly.
20. Use a central vacuum if possible, otherwise an efficient vacuum with a HEPA filter.

THE ALLERGY/ASTHMA INFORMATION ASSOCIATION

See your doctor for a diagnosis and treatment. For more information about allergen avoidance, contact the AAIA at

www.aaia.ca
1 800 611-7011 (English)
1 866 694-0679 (French)

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