What You Should Know About Dust Mites

Instructions
This information can help you know how to reduce your contact with allergens that trigger your symptoms. Many patients enjoy improvement by making changes in their environment. Read the material carefully, answer the questions, and follow instructions.

What Are Dust Mites?

House dust mites are eight-legged, microscopically sized creatures called Arachnids. They are close relatives of ticks, chiggers, and storage mites. They thrive and multiply in warm, humid places. Temperatures at or above 70 degrees F and relative humidity at 75-80 percent are ideal for mite growth. They die when the humidity falls below 40-50% and are rarely found in very dry climates or at altitudes above 6,000 ft.

As many as 18,875 mites can live in one gram of dust with usual populations being between 100-500 per gram (approx. weight of a paper clip). Each mite can produce 10-20 waste particles daily. Their life cycle is 30 days and egg-laying females can add 25-30 new mites to the population.

Mites eat skin flakes and dander which is readily found in our beds, upholstered furniture, carpeting, clothing, stuffed animals, and other textile products. They do not bite us or spread disease. They cause problems for those of us who are allergic to them.

It is the protein substance in the fecal material and body parts of mites that cause allergic reactions. The waste materials is extremely light weight and becomes airborne when we walk on carpets, move about in our beds, or vacuum with a machine that does not efficiently filter the air. Although mite populations may decrease in cold, dry months of the year, your symptoms may be worse at these times. This is because the fecal material remains, breaks into smaller particles, and becomes airborne. Forced air furnaces and increased traffic inside our homes in cold months both contribute to increased mite exposure.

You should not feel guilty as a housekeeper if you have dust mites. They have been found on every continent and usual housekeeping procedures will not remove them. They bury deep into carpets and bedding and it is virtually impossible to vacuum them from these areas.

What Can I Do To Reduce My Contact with Dust Mites?

From what you have read above, where do you think your exposure to mites is occurring?

If you answered, in the bedroom, you are correct. Now, we must determine the articles in the bedroom that could contain mites. What do you think?

How to Control Dust Mites in Your Bedroom?

1. For your bed, there are washable, zippered covers that can encase mites and the fecal material so it doesn’t get into your breathing space.

2. Your sheets, and blankets can be washed in hot water or you can use DMC-3 as a presoak to reduce mite populations in textiles.

3. Pillows of synthetic materials are better and even these should be encased with the zippered covers.

4. Avoid using comforter and chenille bedspreads. Remove stuffed animals, carpeting, knickknacks, books, and other dust collectors.

5. Pets should be kept out of your bedroom. Remember, mites love to eat dander and skin flakes and pets produce both of these.
5. A dehumidifier can keep the relative humidity below 40% to deter mite growth. Lower temperatures are also beneficial.

7. Room Air Cleaners are helpful as they remove the airborne fecal material. These can operate around the clock to reduce your exposure.

8. Hang clothes in your closet and keep the door closed, or put them in dresser drawers. Remember, you want to reduce any dust producers or dust catchers.

**How Do I Clean If I've Have A Dust Mite Allergy?**

Ideally, you should not do the cleaning if you are mite sensitive. Wearing a high efficiency mask can help if you do the cleaning.

Since mites thrive in house dust, reduce dust levels on all surfaces by using either a damp cloth or one of the new electrostatically charged cleaning cloths. Your vacuum cleaner may be your worst enemy in the cleaning process. Most machines blow a lot of dirt into the air thus increasing your exposure. You will enjoy cleaning with a vacuum that has a High Efficiency Particulate Filter to filter the air as it leaves the machine.

Nilfisk, Fantom, Miele, and Euroclean are companies that make HEPA vacuums.

Frequent cleaning is important. Remember, mites multiply and are constantly producing the fecal material that causes your reactions.

**What Products Can I Use To Kill or Reduce Mites In My Home?**

If you keep carpets in your house, you can spray a tannic acid solution, ADS Spray, on them to break down mite allergens. This product can also be sprayed on upholstered furniture. It not only denatures mite allergen but does the same on pollen, mold, and animal dander. However, it does not kill mites so you will need to reapply it every 2 months.

Acarosan is a moist powder of benzyl benzoate which can be brushed into carpets, allowed to dry for 8 to 12 hours, and vacuumed up. It is EPA registered as an acaricide. You should ask your doctor for his recommendation before using this product.

DMC-3 Dust Mite Laundry Treatment can be used in room temperature water as a 10 minute pre-soak to reduce mites in textiles. Initial field tests have shown this product is effective in reducing mite populations in carpets as well.

**Where to Begin?**

1. Underline the suggestions, you will implement immediately to reduce your exposure to dust mites.

2. Put a check by the actions you plan to do within the next month to further reduce your mite exposure.

Written by Jane L. Burnett, B.S. in Education, founder of Allergy-Asthma Shopper. Jane and her family became highly allergic after living in a "sick house". She has spoken on the subject of environmental controls at various medical conventions and has appeared as a guest on TV health talk shows.

Consult with your physician on the application of this information.

For more details, or to place an order for allergen products, call 1-800-447-1100.

Information provided by your allergist.