



House Dust Mite Allergy

Allergy to house dust mite is a problem that affects millions of people all over the world.

Unlike pollens which provoke only seasonal symptoms, house dust mite allergens are present every day of the year. House dust mites allergens may produce nasal, eye, lower respiratory, and skin symptoms in a persistent and recurring way.

WHAT ARE HOUSE DUST MITES?

House dust mites are microscopic, eight-legged insects that are the major cause of allergic reactions to dust.

Dead skin called human dander serves as the primary food source for these common insects. House dust mites do not live on our skin, but rather live in areas where human dander is abundant, like bedding, mattresses and upholstered furniture. Once the mites digest their food, they produce potent allergens which are released in their feces. Inhaling or physically contacting the excrement, which are about the same size of a pollen grain, provokes allergic symptoms. There are many species of mites, but only a few can be found in homes.¹

The most commonly discussed mites, as it relates to human allergy, are *Dermatophagoides farinae* (*D. farinae*) and *Dermatophagoides pteronyssinus* (*D. pteronyssinus*).

WHERE DO HOUSE DUST MITES LIVE?

Because house dust mites feed on human dander, mattresses and pillows are the ideal places for mite infestations and have the highest levels of mite allergens. House dust mites thrive in warm, humid environments. They prefer temperatures at or above 70 degrees and 70 to 80% humidity.¹ Even though house dust mites can be found year-round in your home, they are at their peak in September and October after the warmer weather months.

Carpeting, bedding, upholstered furniture, and even stuffed toys provide ideal conditions for dust mites. Although mattresses and bed covers at home are the major source of mite allergens, mite-allergic individuals are also exposed to significant mite allergens in public places such as schools, movie theaters, and public transportation.

House dust mites are typically found “in things” and not in the air unless dust has been disturbed, like after vacuuming. So, little or no airborne allergen is present in undisturbed air.

DIAGNOSING MITE ALLERGY

If an allergy to dust mite is suspected, the doctor will often perform a skin test to determine if the allergy exists. In a skin test, small droplets of dust mite allergen will be applied to or under the skin. If positive, a red, raised area will develop around the site where the dust mite extract was applied. If there is no reaction, allergy is not suspected. Your medical history and a physical exam, in combination with an allergy diagnostic test (skin or serum), will help your doctor identify a house dust mite allergy.

APPROXIMATELY 80 PERCENT OF ALLERGY
SUFFERERS ARE ALLERGIC TO DUST MITES.²



AVOIDANCE

The key to reducing symptoms to house dust mite allergy is the careful cleaning of all rooms where you spend most of your time. Since most people spend a third of their lives in the bedroom, that is a good place to start. Here are some simple steps you can take;

- Since house dust mites can grow abundantly in your bed, the single most important thing you can do is enclose your mattresses, box springs, and pillows in vinyl or synthetic coverings.
- Change your bed linens and pillowcases weekly
- Use washable blankets and bedspreads
- Eliminate upholstered furniture, carpeting, and drapes
- Wet mop hard surfaces and vacuum weekly
- Remove stuffed animals
- Keep the humidity below 50%
- Use chemical agents to kill mites and remove allergens

TREATING MITE ALLERGY WITH IMMUNOTHERAPY

Allergy immunotherapy is a treatment that effectively treats your allergy symptoms.³ With this treatment, your body builds up a resistance to the allergens that currently impact your day-to-day living.⁴ In a matter of months, symptoms should start to decrease, as will your need for symptomatic medications that control the allergy-associated sneeze, runny nose, cough, wheeze or hives.^{5,6} As an additional benefit, immunotherapy may prevent the onset of other allergies.⁴ Some scientific studies have found that the results of a course of immunotherapy lasting 3 or more years are maintained for 3 years or longer after the course of treatment has been completed.^{7,8} Among the wide variety of treatment possibilities available today, allergy immunotherapy is the only treatment that targets the underlying cause of allergy and alters the natural course of the disease.³ Immunotherapy is not without risks. Possible side effects may include: itching, redness and swelling at the injection site and sometimes soreness hours after an injection. These “local reactions” are not considered serious.⁴ Although rare, a full-body allergic reaction, called anaphylaxis, can occur following an injection. To reduce the risk associated with allergy immunotherapy, it is recommended to wait in your doctor’s office for 30 minutes following an immunotherapy injection.⁴

LEARN MORE ABOUT IMMUNOTHERAPY

Consult a doctor who specializes in allergy. If you experience allergic symptoms, it is important to talk to a doctor who specializes in the diagnosis and treatment of allergic diseases. Based on your history and specific testing, the allergy specialist will be able to determine if you are a candidate for immunotherapy treatment.

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