



## Controlling Dust Mites!!

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Adapted from Allergic Living article "Say Good Night to the Dust Mite"

November 22, 2010, [www.asthma.ca](http://www.asthma.ca) and [www.allergyandasthmafriendly.ca](http://www.allergyandasthmafriendly.ca)



You can't see them, but they're all over your home. Dust mites are tiny, invisible insects that live in fibers on carpet, plush furniture, stuffed animals, curtains, mattresses, pillows and bedding. They are not visible to the naked eye and do not bite or transmit disease. Why then should we be concerned about them?

### What They Are

Dust mites, cousins to the spider, are tiny, eight-legged arachnids measuring only one-quarter to one-third of a millimeter in size. There are thirteen species of mites. They spend two to four months of life eating, creating waste and reproducing. A female will lay 100 eggs in her lifetime. Each mite produces about 10 to 20 waste pellets a day. People with dust allergies are allergic to body parts and droppings (feces) of dust mites.

Dust mites are whitish in colour, and thrive in warmth (24 to 26 degrees C) and humidity (> 50%). Mites eat minuscule flakes of human skin and animal dander. They can't drink, but absorb moisture from the atmosphere.

### Where They Live

The highest concentration of dust mites will be found in your bed. Dust mites eat flakes of skin. Did you know that the average adult sheds two pounds of dead skin per year, much of it while sleeping? As a consequence, an average mattress contains between 100,000 and 10 million dust mites.

It's estimated that between 10 and 25% of North Americans are sensitized to dust mite droppings and that these pests will spark wheezing in more than

50% of asthmatics. A study done in 2000 found that 23% had bedding with concentrations of allergen high enough to trigger asthma attacks.

### Common Dust Mite Allergy Symptoms

Common dust mite allergy symptoms include:

- Sneezing
- Runny nose
- Itchy, red or watery eyes
- Stuffy nose
- Itchy nose, mouth or throat
- Postnasal drip
- Cough

If a dust mite allergy triggers your asthma, you may also experience:

- Difficulty breathing
- Chest tightness or pain
- Chest wheezing or whistling sound when breathing out
- Trouble sleeping caused by shortness of breath, chest tightness, coughing or wheezing.

### What You Can Do

The best treatment for dust mite allergy symptoms is allergy avoidance. Limiting your exposure to the allergen is the most effective treatment. With an average of eight hours of sleep nightly, the bedroom is the most frequently inhabited room in your home and the best place to begin reducing dust mites.



### A few key strategies include:

- Make sure your home is too dry for dust mites to survive. Maintain a humidity level between 40 and 50 per cent. Consider purchasing a hygrometer (available at building supply stores) to monitor the level of moisture. Exercise caution with humidifier use. Use an air conditioner or dehumidifier, as needed, along with kitchen and bathroom fans to help reduce mite accumulation and mold growth. Because basements are tough to keep dry, avoid inhabiting a basement bedroom if you are sensitive or mite allergic.
  - Encase your mattress, box spring, duvet and pillows in zippered, mite-proof covers. They are made from tightly woven fabric, usually polyester or a cotton/poly blend. They are designed to hold up to frequent washings. Look for brands that have passed rigorous allergy/asthma certification. They are available from furniture, medical device stores or pharmacies.
  - Wash your sheets & blankets weekly in hot water (minimum of 130 degrees F) to kill the dust mites.
  - Stuffed animals can harbor just as many mites as a pillow. Every eight weeks or so, place these toys in the freezer for 24 hours (freezing kills the mites). Follow up with a spin in the washer and dryer. When possible, limit stuffed toys.
  - Mites have sticky feet that cling to soft surfaces like carpet fiber and upholstery. While a good quality HEPA filter vacuum will reduce their numbers, it is virtually impossible to vacuum the “live” dust mites out. Alternatively, use a central vacuum system that is vented to the outside (not the basement). If possible, avoid wall-to-wall carpets and opt for solid surface flooring such as hardwood, laminate, tile or vinyl. If carpet removal is not an option, steam cleaning is the most effective option. Avoid sweeping as this creates airborne dust.
  - Minimize plush furnishings such as curtains (a washable roll down blind is best), upholstered furniture, down-filled covers and decorative pillows.
  - Damp dust and damp mop all hard surfaces and flooring at least weekly. Use a HEPA filter-equipped vacuum to rid the house of dirt and pollen, and to deprive the mites of their food source, skin cells shed by family members and pets. If you are dust mite sensitive, wear a filtering mask when cleaning (available at most drug stores).
  - If you have a forced air gas furnace, place a filter over the bedroom vents (available at most building supply stores).
  - Remove all clutter (e.g. ornaments, mobiles, silk flowers, clothes, plants, open shelves etc.) to reduce the number of places that dust can collect.
  - Treat other rooms in your house like your bedroom.
- Other tips include:
- Throw rugs that can be washed are preferable to carpet. Carpet with a short, tight pile is preferable over other types of carpet.
  - Dry cleaning is also effective for killing dust mites.
  - Change furnace filters regularly.
  - Store books in cabinets with doors closed. Keep storage closets closed and containers covered.
  - Check out the website [www.asthmaandallergy.ca](http://www.asthmaandallergy.ca) for further information.
- If you are concerned about dust mite allergy symptoms, testing for dust mite allergy, treatment alternatives or your respiratory health, please speak to your family physician, nurse practitioner or respiratory educator by calling Saskatoon Community Clinic at 306-652-0300. ◊

Source: Saskatoon Community Clinic Focus newsletter, Spring 2018.