

HOUSE DUST MITES AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONTROL



Many years ago, scientists discovered that exposure to house dust was the cause of allergic symptoms for certain individuals. More recently, they found that most of the allergy caused by house dust was due to one of its components—the ever-present house dust mite. These arthropods are related to ticks and spiders, are microscopic and can be found in any house—no matter how clean it may seem. They tend to collect in materials made of cotton-like fibers (and feather), including mattresses, pillows, comforters, carpets, stuffed furniture and drapery.

Dust mites are probably the most important cause of allergy around the world, but particularly in South Florida. Although these mites are harmful to some allergy sufferers, they are harmless to those who are not allergic.

Particles of these dust mites are inhaled through the nose or mouth and can cause allergy sufferers to sneeze, wheeze and itch (among other symptoms). Dust mites rubbing against the skin can even worsen eczema (atopic dermatitis).

Many species of dust mites thrive in South Florida, but the most important are *Dermatophyoides farinae* and *Dermatophyoides pteronyssius*, and new species are continuously being discovered.

How To Avoid House Dust Mites

The first set of techniques is easy, fairly inexpensive, and the most effective. We concentrate on the bedroom because you spend 1/3 of your time sleeping and the highest concentration of dust mites is found in your bed. These measures will also help with allergies to mold and animal dander.

Wash all bedding, including sheets, pillowcases, blankets, mattress pads, in VERY HOT water every week. Water hotter than 125 degrees kills dust mites. If, for child safety reasons, it is necessary to keep hot water at 120 degrees or less, soak the bedding in bleach (Do not inhale bleach fumes) and water for 10 minutes prior to the washing. The best type of blanket to use is a VelluxTM-type because it is so durable with repeated washings and doesn't collect much dust. Comforters are BIG dust collectors and should be avoided. If using a comforter, get a dust-mite encasement for it (see below).

Purchase vinyl or semi-permeable dust mite encasements for your mattress, pillow, boxspring and comforter. Vinyl zippered encasements are the least expensive (less than \$20) but are very effective and durable. Adults might find them a bit uncomfortable, but placing a washable quilted mattress pad on top makes them easier to sleep on. The more permeable encasements are breathable and are very comfortable. The best prices for these are usually available by mail-order companies, with most companies' products being very similar. Shop for the best price.

Remove clutter from the bedroom by removing stuffed animals, putting away dirty clothes, and taking books and magazines out of the bedroom. For children, try to limit them to one washable stuffed animal on the bed, and remember to wash it frequently in hot water.

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Vacuum the carpet regularly. The dust mite allergic person should be out of the house while the vacuuming is being done. If allergy sufferers are forced to do the vacuuming themselves, they should consider wearing a mask. Use an HEPA-quality vacuum cleaner. There are many reasonably priced models on the market (less than \$200-300), a good example being the Hoover "Wind-Tunnel." There are vacuums that are much more expensive but are not that much more effective for eliminating dust mites (*according to Consumer Reports*). Also, purchase special double-lined, dust mite quality vacuum bags for your vacuum.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION ON DUST MITES,
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Expensive but very effective— Consider removing the carpet!

Removing carpeting from a bedroom may be more expensive than other measures but, in the long run, it is quite cost-effective when considering the time and money saved from reduced medical related expenses. It is also one of the most effective means of avoiding dust mites.

If the carpet cannot be replaced now, consider replacing it in the future with linoleum or tile when it gets worn or stained.

If you are moving in the near future, try to find an apartment or house that already has all linoleum or tile floors. If living in an apartment, consider asking a doctor to address a note to the landlord stating your allergy to dust mites and that it is "medically necessary" that the carpeting be removed.

For comfort, small throw rugs near the bed or other areas are effective-however, don't forget to vacuum these rugs. Also, leaving rugs out in the sun for a few hours is effective in killing dust mites.

Office Locations:

- Kendall ▪ Coral Gables ▪ Miami Lakes ▪ Aventura
- Pembroke Pines ▪ Ft. Lauderdale ▪ Plantation

Leave the Air Conditioning on as much as possible. Keep the A/C on as cool as you can tolerate and afford. Dust mites and molds can't survive when it is cool and dry. Humidifiers, however, may aggravate the dust mite and mold problem. Change filters often. De-humidifiers may be helpful, but be sure to clean up moldy surfaces with bleach-containing cleaners and to remove mold-contaminated materials (e.g., black-stained ceiling tiles). Be careful not to inhale the fumes from bleach since they may trigger nasal or lung symptoms. Remove kitchen garbage frequently and check the pail for mold accumulation.

Last and Least

Acaricides (chemical treatments for carpeting that kill mites), electrostatic filters, and duct cleaning are all only slightly beneficial and can be quite costly. Try the previous methods first.

Indoor Allergens

Rinse furry pets (cats, dogs, rabbits, etc.) off with plain, warm water, which is effective at lowering exposure of animal dander. Try to do this once or twice a week. Chemical treatments for pets are not very effective—water works just fine. Bedrooms should be off-limits to pets. Removal of carpets and dust mite encasements are also effective for pet allergies. HEPA-room filters control animal dander very effectively.

Lastly, limit the amount of house plants as the soil provides an excellent growth medium for molds.

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