

**House Dust Mite Allergy**

*Allergy to house dust mites is very common and can trigger allergic reactions such as asthma, eczema and rhinitis. Cutting down mite numbers may reduce these reactions. Hopefully this information sheet will answer a few questions and point you in the right direction to reducing mite numbers in the home.*

What are house dust mites?

House dust mites are creatures which are so small that they cannot be seen with the naked eye. They live in all our homes and feed mainly on the scales of skin that we shed. They are most common in warm, damp areas where dust containing skin scales gathers. These areas include pillows, mattresses, carpets, soft furnishings, soft toys & clothing.

The mites are harmless to most of us but they can cause allergic symptoms in some people. These symptoms are caused by breathing in substances known as allergens which are contained within the mite droppings.

 Measures to avoid house dust mite can lower levels of house dust mite in the home, but do not totally eradicate the allergens.

*If you have had a positive skin or blood test to house dust mite and you feel your symptoms are caused by house dust mite, here are a few steps to reduce house dust mites in the home. For best results the steps should be carried out over the whole house. If this is not practical, concentrate on the rooms where the person with the allergy spends most of their time i.e  the bedroom or the sitting room.*

Bedroom:

* Use allergen-proof barrier covers on all mattresses, duvets and pillows.
* Wash all bedding that is not encased in barrier covers every week. Washing at 60 degrees centigrade or above will kill mites.
* Allergic children should not sleep in the bottom bunk where house dust mite allergen can fall down onto them.
* If possible remove all carpeting in the bedroom. Vacuum hard flooring regularly with a hoover that has a high efficiency filter. (HEPA)
* Use curtains that can be washed at 60 degrees centigrade and wash regularly at this temperature.
* Damp-wipe all surfaces each week.
* Washable stuffed toys should be washed as frequently and at the same temperature as bedding. Alternatively, if the toy cannot be washed at 60 degrees centigrade place it in a plastic bag in the freezer for at least 12 hours and then wash at the recommended temperature.
* Keep toys that are not in current use away in a toy chest or cupboard.
* Reduce humidity by increasing ventilation by using trickle-vents in double glazing, or open windows.
* Apply an effective allergen barrier balm around the edge of each nostril to trap or block pollens and other allergens.
* Allergen barriers are available as balms or gel nasal sprays.

General tips for the home:

* When you buy new furnishings consider leather-like or leather covered furniture which are easy to clean and do not harbour house dust mite.
* House dust mites prefer warm, damp homes so open windows or vents in kitchens and bathrooms during and after cooking, washing and bathing. To stop dampness spreading to the rest of the house, keep the doors to these rooms closed.
* Avoid drying clothes indoors, especially in the bedrooms and living room. If you have to dry clothes indoors, open a window and close the door to the room where the damp clothes are.
* Run central heating a few degrees lower (especially in the bedroom).
* Reduce the number of items on which dust can build up e.g keep ornaments in display cabinets, place books in closed cases and put clothes and other objects in cupboards or drawers.
* Regularly clean surfaces/objects where dust collects using a damp cloth.
* (Dry cloths will not pick up all the dust and will let a lot of it back into the air.)
* Vacuum all surfaces of upholstered furniture at least twice a week.

Pets

* Pets should be kept off the furniture where possible.
* Provide cats and dogs with their own bedding preferably made/covered with an anti- allergy cover such as that used in bedding.
* Groom pets outdoors.
* Wash pets regularly to remove the allergens.
* Wash pet beds at 60 degrees centigrade.

All information adapted from Allergy UK and BSACI websites.