

House Dust Mite

Dust avoidance

Dust mites are the cause of dust allergy. People actually become allergic to the droppings the dust mites leave behind. Dust mites are small animals, so small you could fit several on the head of a pin. Dust mites eat the skin scales that we shed when sleeping or changing clothing, so they are mostly in the bedroom. In fact, there are ten times more in the bedroom than anywhere else in the house. Most of these are in the mattress, but the carpet is also a major reservoir for the mites.

Dust mites like humidity, and if you can keep the indoor humidity less than 40% they won't survive as well. A bedside vaporizer is a bad idea for people who are allergic to dust mites.

The bed

Mattresses and box springs must be completely encased in medical-grade dust-proof covers. Even a four-month old mattress has lots of dust mites. The most comfortable and effective ones are only available at medical supply companies—you can see examples of mattress encasings when you visit the allergy clinic, or check one of the manufacturers at allergycontrol.com. Inexpensive or vinyl covers are okay for the box spring. Two weeks after you put the special covers on, there are 90 per cent fewer dust mites in your mattress. Wash these covers at least every 6 months.

Washing

Pillows must be machine washable and should be washed monthly, or else covered with the same dust-proof covers. Hot water washing kills the dust mites and removes the allergen, while dry cleaning will kill them but not remove the allergen. Polyester pillows stand up to frequent washing best, but you can use feather or down if you wash them monthly, or cover them with the dust-proof covers. Everything else on the bed should be washed in hot water at least once a month, even the stuffed toys!

Floors:

Hardwood or linoleum floors are better than carpet. There are no commercially available cleaning agents in Canada that can get rid of dust mites. Although vacuuming helps, you can't get rid of the dust mites in carpet. For floors with no carpet, wet mopping, or using an electrostatic wipe (e.g. Swiffer®), and using a damp cloth or Swiffer® when dusting works best. Keep the dust sensitive person away when the cleaning is being done.

If you do the house cleaning yourself, dust-proof masks available from hardware stores may be helpful.