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HOUSE DUST MITE INFORMATION LEAFLET

House dust mites 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 gather. These areas include pillows, mattresses, carpets, soft furnishings, soft toys and even 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 with the mites droppings. The droppings are so small that they become airborne and then may be breathed in just like a grain of pollen. There are other allergens as well as house dust mite which can trigger allergic reactions e.g. moulds, cat and dogs, or pollen from trees and grasses. Dr Buckley can do allergy testing to find out exactly what you are allergic to.

Why do house dust mites need to be controlled?

Drugs can treat and control the symptoms of allergic asthma, eczema and rhinitis but do not provide a cure. Although it probably won't stop the need to use them altogether cutting the numbers of house dust mites in the home may reduce the amount of drugs required and help to control symptoms.

Step by step guide to controlling house dust mites in the home.

If feel that you or your family members symptoms are caused by the house dust mite here are a few steps to reduce house dust mites in the home. **It is essential if you are considering any expensive alterations or the purchase of bedding covers that you should have allergy tests to identify if house dust mite allergy is a relevant contributor to your problems.**

For the 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 there time i.e. the bedroom or sitting room.

The first steps mentioned are the easiest and cheapest, the later steps are more expensive. Bear in mind that although they will reduce exposure to mite allergen there is no guarantee that these steps will reduce allergic symptoms. The number of steps needed to give an effect will differ from person to person and it may take at least two months before the effects of carrying out the steps are fully evident.

***STEP 1* Reduce dampness in the home.**

House dust mites prefer warm, damp homes. Dampness can also lead to the growth of moulds which can cause allergic reactions too. These are some ways of avoiding dampness:-

- Open windows or vents in kitchens or bathrooms during and after cooking, washing and bathing.
- To stop dampness spreading to the rest of the house keep the door to these rooms closed.

- Avoid drying clothes indoors, especially in the bedrooms and living rooms, unless using dryers which are vented outdoors.
- If you have to dry clothes indoors, open a window and close the door to the room where the damp clothes are.
- Air bedding before remaking beds.
- Open windows or vents in bedrooms.
- Run central heating a few degrees lower. (especially in bedrooms)

STEP 2 Prevent build up of dust

Removing dust is important in the homes of allergy sufferers. To prevent dust building up in the home:-

- Reduce the number of items on which dust can build up, especially if they are difficult to clean e.g. keeping ornaments in display cabinets, placing books in closed cases and putting 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 of the dust and will let a lot of it back into the air.)
- Regularly wipe down window blinds with a damp cloth.
- Vacuum clean soft furnishings and curtains as well as carpets/floors. Replace the air filter or dust bag in the vacuum cleaner regularly.
- Vacuum clean mattresses every two weeks.

STEP 3 High temperature washing

Washing fabrics at a minimum of 60° Centigrade kills house dust mites therefore:-

- Use sheets, pillowcases and duvet covers that can be washed at 60° C and wash them at this temperature at least every two weeks.
- Use curtains that can be washed at 60° C and wash regularly at this temperature.

STEP 4 Bedding and soft toys

House dust mites are found in large numbers in mattresses, duvets/bedding and pillows where there are lots of skin scales. To reduce the number of mites in these areas:-

- Replace pillows with new ones every six months (unless the pillows have special covers).
- Replace blankets with duvets which are made of synthetic material.
- Cover all mattresses, duvets and pillows in the sufferer's bedroom with micro-porous membrane covers that are house-dust impermeable and ideally water-vapour permeable and air-permeable for best comfort (eg; Mitex anti-allergy mattress cover). These covers need to be wiped clean with a damp cloth each time the bedding is changed.
- Stuffed soft toys can also contain house dust mites so try to reduce the allergy sufferer's contact with these toys. Keep the toys away from the bed if possible otherwise about once a month put soft toys in the freezer for at least 12 hours and preferably 24 hours to kill the house dust mite. You can place them inside a plastic bag to put them in the freezer. On removal from the freezer the toys should be washed to remove dead mites and allergens, dried and then vacuumed.
Replace your mattress if it is more than seven years old. Foam mattresses are less likely to harbor the mite.

STEP 5 Carpets

Carpets also contain a lot of house dust mites. Replacing carpets can be expensive but if you are going to change your carpet anyway these are some options which will reduce the number of mites present:-

- Replace carpets with linoleum/vinyl flooring or sealed natural flooring such as cork, tiles or wood. Make sure that the new floor does not have cracks in which dust may build up.
- Choose very short pile, synthetic carpets as they tend to retain the mite allergens due to electrostatic charge and as a consequence less

may be airborne on disturbance than from traditional long piled wool carpets.

- Use cotton rugs that can be washed at high temperatures (60°) and wash them regularly.
- Steam cleaning has been shown to kill mites and when coupled with industrial vacuuming to reduce allergen levels in carpeting.
- Acaricidal sprays or dust powders (chemicals which kill house dust mites) are commercially available. Whilst they are effective in the laboratory in killing mites in practice in the home they are less effective as they may not penetrate deeply within the carpet pile. Furthermore for full effect they have to be properly applied to all the carpet which is time consuming and may account for some of the lesser effects when used in everyday practice. Acaricidal treatments have to be repeated every 2-3 months, as the effects are not long lasting.

STEP 6 High efficiency filter vacuum cleaners

There are vacuum cleaners on the market which are better at collecting dust than ordinary vacuum cleaners so:-

- Consider buying a high efficiency filtered vacuum cleaner and use regularly on floors, carpets, soft toys and soft furnishings.
- Look for the British Allergy Foundation (BAF) seal of approval.
- It is not necessarily the most expensive vacuum that is the best.
- Although not widely available in this country, central vacuum cleaners, which are installed within a home, allow the use of a higher suction power due to the larger motor and central collection in a large reservoir. This is normally in a basement or garage and can be periodically emptied by a non-allergy sufferer. Such a consideration is applicable when designing and building a new home.

STEP 7 Replace furnishings

When you buy new furnishings you should consider:-

- Replacing woven fabric covered chairs and sofas with cane, canvas, leather-like or leather covered furnishings which are easy to clean and do not harbor dust mites.

Other possible measures:-

Products such as air filters, dehumidifiers and mechanical devices for ventilation with heat recovery are available. These may also help to reduce allergic symptoms but their effectiveness has not been fully tested as yet. In general these approaches do not have sufficient effect when used solely by themselves but air filtration units have been shown to be a useful adjunct when used in conjunction with bedding covers. The use of total home air filtration and extraction systems have been shown to reduce house dust mite levels and improve symptoms. Such systems with a heat recovery exchange unit need to be considered during the building of a new home as they are less applicable to older housing as the home needs to be relatively airtight.

DUST AVOIDANCE MEASURES IN THE BEDROOM

1. Dust everywhere twice weekly with a damp duster.
2. Hoover the whole room (including the curtains, the mattress and under the bed) twice weekly.
3. Avoid storing dust-collecting objects in the bedroom (e.g. stuffed toys, old books, etc.)
4. Use a foam pillow.
5. Use non-woollen blankets or an artificial fibre continental quilt (not an eiderdown).

Allerjeeze ANTI ALLERGY MATTRESS COVERS

Allerjeeze anti-allergy covers are designed to form a barrier for mattresses which protect those who are sensitive to house dust mites and their allergens. The covers are vapour permeable and so allow body moisture particles and body heat to pass through, making them cool, comfortable and silent to sleep on, and at the same time reduce exposure to the dust mite allergens. They completely enclose the mattress and are zipped closed. They need only be damp dusted in situ, occasionally; they do not have to be removed to be cleaned. Use foam pillows and an artificial fiber continental quilt on the bed and no carpets on the bedroom floor.

Allerjeeze covers are recommended by the Asthma Society of Ireland (ASI) and are available on their website VAT free: www.asthma.ie

Here our measurement and prices:

Item Name	Item Measurements	Price to non ASI members	Price to ASI members
Single Mattress Cover	39x75x9 inch / 93x193x23 cm	€50	€39
Double Mattress Cover	55x75x9 inch / 140x190x23 cm	€62	€48
Double Mattress Cover Deep Base	55x75x11 inch / 140x190x28 cm	€65	€54

Go on line to see other sizes = www.asthma.ie

BUY FROM: The Asthma Society of Ireland (ASI).

Join the ASI for free on-line and get reduced rates on mattress covers.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

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