



House Dust Mite Allergy

What are house dust mites?

The house dust mite is a very small (microscopic) creature that gets its name from its habitat. They live in all our homes and are particularly present in fabrics that are heavily used, such as beds, upholstered furniture, furry toys and carpets. They feed mainly on the scales of skin that we shed. They thrive well in humid, warm conditions.

What is house dust mite allergy? What are the symptoms?

House dust mites are harmless, but their droppings can cause allergic symptoms in some people. The droppings are so small that they become airborne and then may be breathed in. This can trigger allergic symptoms such as sneezing, itchy, streaming eyes, runny or blocked nose and sometimes chest tightness and wheezing.

The same kind of allergic symptoms can be triggered by a range of other indoor and outdoor allergens such as moulds, animal dander (hair, fur or feathers) or pollen from trees and grasses.

Diagnosis and treatment for house dust mite allergy

Your allergy doctor or nurse will ask you detailed questions about the symptoms you have and when they happen. This is the most important part of making an allergy diagnosis. Allergy testing (skin prick test /blood test) can help to show if house dust mites may be triggering some of your allergic symptoms.

Treatment includes medication (nose sprays and antihistamines) and general measures to reduce the amount of house dust mite in your home. It is very important to use these medications as advised. Allergy medications, particularly nasal sprays, are much more effective when you use them regularly. You may not notice much difference after using the spray once or twice but after a couple of weeks most people notice a big improvement.

Some patients' symptoms cannot be managed adequately with the above treatment. Patients who have persistent symptoms despite regular medications may be considered for house dust mite desensitisation therapy (house dust mite immunotherapy). This treatment aims to reduce the allergic reaction to the house dust mite by re-training the immune system. The treatment is made from house dust mite proteins and is usually given as a tablet or drops under the tongue.

Measures to reduce the dust mites in your home

It is impossible to eliminate house dust mites completely, but you can reduce their numbers. Cutting down mite numbers may help to reduce your symptoms.

General measures

With all these measures it is best to focus on the bedroom as this is where you have the most exposure to house dust mite.

- Increase ventilation: open windows and doors, ideally for at least an hour each day
- Reduce the heat. Turn down central heating especially in bedrooms when not in use
- Remove dust from hard surfaces using a damp cloth or static duster
- Reduce humidity. Keep kitchen and bathroom doors closed when cooking or running hot water. Do not dry wet clothing indoors
- Vacuum frequently, preferably in the morning, with an approved vacuum with a HEPA filter; someone other than the patient should do this if possible

Soft furnishings/bedding/toys

- Enclose mattresses, pillows and duvet in a recommended allergen barrier cover
- Wash all bed linens weekly at 60°C
- Wipe barrier covers weekly with a damp cloth, allow to dry completely
- Put furry toys into a plastic bag in the freezer for 12 hours at least monthly. Let them thaw slowly or wash them at 60°
- If carpets are due for renewal, replace them with hard floors (e.g. laminate or lino). These are easier to keep dust-free
- If curtains are due for renewal replace with blinds or easily washed curtains
- Get rid of unnecessary soft furnishings e.g. soft toys, cushions, etc

Note that “non-allergenic” pillows, duvets etc usually means that the filling does not cause allergic reactions. House dust mites can live in there just as well, so they still need an allergy cover.

Contact us

If you have any other questions or concerns:

- Telephone: 0121 424 1807 or 0121 424 2169 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm)
- Email: I&AMedicalSecretaries@uhb.nhs.uk

Useful links:

- www.allergyuk.org. – Helpline and information service to support people with allergies
- www.nhs.uk/conditions/allergies. – information on symptoms, diagnosis and treatment of allergies.
- www.bsaci.org.uk. – The British Society for Allergy and Clinical Immunology. Helpful for both patients and health care professionals alike

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