

# Patient Information on House Dust Mite Allergy

**A**llergy to house dust mites is a problem that affects millions of people all over the world. Unlike pollen allergies, house dust mite allergy affects patients all year round, eliciting symptoms like rhinoconjunctivitis, asthma and dermatitis. Studies indicate that 5%-30% of the population are allergic to dust mites.

## The Cause

Tiny 8-legged creatures called dust mites seem to be the major cause of allergic reactions in house dust. House dust mites survive on shed human skin scales. As these mites digest their food, they produce potent allergens which are released in their fecal pellets (droppings). Inhaling these microscopic pellets provoke allergic symptoms such as nasal congestion, itching, watery eyes, sneezing and asthma.



## Where They Live

Because house dust mites feed on shed human skin scales, mattresses and pillows are ideal places for mite infestation and have the highest levels of mite allergens. House dust mites thrive in warm, humid environments. They prefer temperatures at or above 70 degrees. Wall-to-wall carpeting, central heating, bedding, upholstered furniture, wallpaper or even stuffed toys provide ideal conditions for dust mites. Although



mattresses and bed covers at home are the major source of mite allergens, mite-allergic patients are also exposed to significant mite allergens in public places such as schools, cinemas and public transportation.

## Treatment

While avoidance measures should always be the first line of treatment, new studies point towards a combination of avoidance measures with mite-specific immunotherapy.

### Avoidance

The key to reducing symptoms is the careful cleaning of all rooms where you spend most of your time. Since most people spend about a third of their lives in the bedroom, that is a good place to start. Here are some simple steps you should take:

- Since mites can grow abundantly in your bed, the single most important thing you can do is enclose your mattresses, boxsprings and pillows in vinyl or synthetic coverings.
- Change your bed linens and pillow cases frequently.

- Use washable blankets and bed spreads.
- Eliminate upholstered furniture, carpeting and drapes.
- Wet your mop and vacuum frequently.
- Remove stuffed toys.
- Use air filtration devices.
- Keep the humidity as low as possible (35%-50%) to retard proliferation.
- Use chemical agents to kill house dust mites and denature allergens.

### Immunotherapy

The symptoms of mite-specific allergies can be significantly reduced with immunotherapy, which interferes with the basic mechanisms of the disease. It involves administering gradually increasing doses of mite allergens that stimulate the patient's own immune system to become resistant to future allergic symptoms and reactions. Numerous studies have documented the clinical safety and efficacy of immunotherapy for mite-sensitive patients. These studies support immunotherapy for both children and adults, covering both allergic rhinitis and asthma.

## Finding Out More About Immunotherapy

Consult an allergist. If you have experienced allergic symptoms, it is important to talk to an allergist, a doctor who is a specialist in the diagnosis and treatment of allergic diseases. Based on your past history and certain testing, the allergist will be able to determine if you are a candidate for immunotherapy treatment.

For more information contact:

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The American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology at 1-800-842-7777



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