

# MEDfacts

An Educational Health Series From National Jewish Health®



## ALLERGIES TO DUST MITES

### Facts About Allergies

The tendency to develop allergies may be inherited. If you have allergic tendencies and are exposed to certain things in your environment (allergens), you may develop allergies to some of those things. Examples of allergy symptoms include itchy eyes, runny nose, asthma symptoms, eczema and rash. The timing of the allergic response may be immediate or delayed. Allergy testing may be recommended to help identify your allergies.

### Allergies to Dust Mite

Dust mites are microscopic animals, too small to be seen with the naked eye. The droppings and decaying bodies of dust mites are important allergens. These dust mites live in mattresses, pillows, bedding, carpets, fabric-covered furniture, old clothing and soft stuffed toys. They feed on human skin scales. Dust mites are most common in humid climates. They don't survive when the humidity is below 40-50%. If droppings of dust mites are inhaled or come in contact with the skin, they may cause allergy, asthma and/or eczema symptoms.

### Environmental Control

Once an allergy has been identified, the next step is to decrease or eliminate exposure to the allergen. This is called environmental control. Evidence shows that allergy and asthma symptoms may improve over time, if the recommended environmental control changes are made. Many of the changes are for the entire home. The bedroom is the most important, because the bedroom is where people usually spend 1/3 to 1/2 of their time.

### Steps to Control Dust Mite Allergens

- Enclose the mattress and boxsprings in a zippered dust-proof encasing. Dust-proof encasings have a layer of material that keeps the dust mites inside the encasing. Encasings are usually made of plastic or plastic-like materials. If there is more than one mattress in the bedroom all mattresses should be

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encased. Wash all bedding in hot (130° F) water, weekly. Put the pillows in zippered dust proof encasings and/or wash the pillows weekly with the bedding.

- Avoid lying on upholstered furniture or carpet.

### Other Helpful Suggestions

- Remove carpeting from the bedroom. Instead, use area rugs that can be washed.
- Use wood, leather or vinyl furniture instead of upholstered furniture in the bedroom.
- Vacuum rugs and carpets often. The person with a dust mite allergy should not vacuum or be in a room while it is being vacuumed.
- Keep the indoor moisture low. The ideal humidity level is 30-40%. Use an air conditioner or dehumidifier in warm climates to decrease the humidity. Clean the dehumidifier regularly.
- Humidifiers/vaporizers are not recommended because they will increase humidity in the room and create a favorable environment for dust mites. If you must use a humidifier, clean it daily to prevent mold growth. Keep the humidity below 40%.
- Chemical solutions may be helpful. Acaricides (a chemical that kills dust mites) must be applied regularly to carpeting or upholstered furniture. This solution will not remove any preexisting mite droppings. A tannic acid solution, applied as directed, can help neutralize the allergen in mite droppings.

Your health care provider may recommend additional medications, therapies or other environmental controls. Exposure to dust mites can make allergy, asthma and/or eczema symptoms worse in some people. To avoid these problems follow the above steps to decrease or eliminate exposure.

Note: This information is provided to you as an educational service of National Jewish. It is not meant to be a substitute for consulting with your own physician.

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