

# House dust mite allergy advice

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## Information for patients from Head and Neck

This leaflet explains what dust mites are and where they can be found. Plus it provides some tips on removing mites from your house.

### What are house dust mites?

- House dust mites are tiny creatures that are only 0.3 millimetres in size, invisible to the naked eye.
- They live on shed flakes of human skin, house dust, plant fibres, and other mites and insects.
- In their lifetime female mites can lay 60 to 100 eggs, depending on their living conditions. They live for approximately three to four months.

### Where are they found?

They thrive in warm, dark, and damp places and are therefore found in all UK homes. Our houses provide warmth with home insulation and double glazing. Carpet and bedding provide a ready made home and this is made even better for the mites by humidity from such things as gas fires and clothes drying over radiators.

### How do they affect us?

Allergy symptoms, for example itching of the nose, eyes, and skin, and asthma can be caused by the house dust mite's faeces/dung.



## Tips for removing mites and their dung

You cannot remove **all** house dust mites from your home but by using the tips in this leaflet they can be reduced.

You should concentrate on your bedroom and sitting room. However the bedroom is the main source of food and warmth for the mites, as we spend a third of every day there.

- Replace feather pillows and eiderdowns with those with a synthetic filling.
- Wash all your bedding on a hot wash each week. Hot tumble drying and ironing your bed cloths will also help to reduce the number of mites.
- Shake bedding and air your bed daily rather than make it.
- Use special mite impermeable micro-porous mattress covers. The plastic variety can be damp dusted. The mattress covers should enclose the whole mattress and fasten with a zip.
- Buy new pillows every six months or use special barrier covers. Damp dust if possible. Pillows can also be put in the freezer every three months for eight hours, as this will kill the mites.
- Vacuum your bed each week as well as the floor. Pay attention to the mattress piping and buttons.
- Have either roller blinds or light, washable curtains and wash them frequently. Avoid heavy curtains and Venetian blinds as they attract dust.
- Hardwood flooring, tiles, and vinyl are preferable to carpets, as these harbour mites and act as an allergen reservoir.
- Keep bookshelves to a minimum, as these trap dust and keep the head of the bed clutter free. Damp dust all surfaces.
- Keep soft toys to a minimum, as these trap dust. Either wash them in a hot wash or place them in the freezer for eight hours every couple of weeks.
- Avoid drying clothes on radiators, as this produces damp and moisture.
- Pay attention to all other upholstered furniture. Vacuum the head rests, arms, and edges of seats.
- Use vacuum cleaners with disposable bags or special allergy vacuums fitted with HEPA (high efficiency particle arresting) filters. These can be expensive.
- Open windows and ventilate the house as much as possible, particularly the bedroom and after a shower/bath. Let the steam out while cooking to reduce humidity.
- Have plastic washable animal baskets/beds. Wash pet blankets separately and regularly.
- Keep animals out of your bedroom.

**This leaflet has been produced with and for patients**

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