

## AVOIDANCE OF HOUSE DUST MITES

House mites are eight-legged organisms that are microscopic. They are related to the tick and spider family, however do not bite or spread disease, and are only harmful to those persons who are allergic to them. They feed on human skin cells, and therefore are found in most areas that humans frequent.

People who are allergic are allergic to the animal parts when the animal decomposes, as well as to the protein that surrounds the fecal pellets. These pellets are extremely light and are easily stirred up by walking, vacuuming, cleaning or changing of the bed linens. When the pellets are inhaled sensitized patients may develop allergy symptoms such as nasal congestion or asthma.

Large numbers of mites are found in bed linens, mattresses, carpets and upholstered furniture. Furniture made of leather or wood does not contain mites because there is very little area available for burrowing. High humidity temperatures favor the reproduction of mites. Locations which are both dry and cool have very little problems with house dust mites.

The treatment of those allergic to house dust mites is first avoidance. If avoidance fails then medications or immunotherapy may be indicated. The following are the avoidance measures that are proven and are relatively simple, safe and inexpensive:

1. Encase mattresses and box springs in plastic encasings. These can be purchased at most department stores and from the numbers listed below.
2. Replace pillows with washable synthetic pillows or encase pillows in plastic encasings. If you choose a washable pillow it should be washed weekly in hot water.
3. Remove all bulky upholstered furniture from the bedroom. If possible, convert to vinyl, leather or wooden furnishings in other areas of the house. The emphasis should be on the bedroom first, making that a clean haven for the patient who is allergic to mites.
4. Remove carpets from bedroom. If the carpets cannot be removed treat with 3% tannic acid. Many companies sell this preparation. A listing of 1-800 numbers follow below. Tannic acid application should be repeated every three months and used only as instructed.
5. Wash bed linens every 7 days in hot water (130 F). This includes mattress pads, sheets, blankets and bedspreads.
6. Keep the humidity at less than 50% and the temperature at 70 F or lower. This is easily achieved with air conditioning in the summer and heating in the winter. However, a dehumidifier may be needed in the spring and fall to control the humidity.
7. Vacuuming should be done on a weekly basis. During the time of vacuuming and for 30 minutes after the patient should avoid the surroundings or wear a mask. Dust mites are relatively heavy and go into a suspension in the air for about 20-30 minutes after stirred up.
8. Eliminate draperies and other dust collection materials, such as books from the bedroom.
9. Eliminate stuffed toys and animals from the bedroom unless they are washable. If washable, they should be washed weekly in hot water.

Again, it should be emphasized that making the bedroom a safe and comfortable haven for the patient is extremely important. Other rooms can be gradually converted to mite resistant environments, but should not be substituted for making the bedroom a safe haven. If mite avoidance does not work, your physician can discuss with you the possibility of starting medical therapy, increasing medical therapy, or, in some cases may recommend immunotherapy.

Since we cannot sponsor individual companies, a series of 1-800 numbers for companies who sell the products discussed above are listed below for your calling convenience. It should be kept in mind that most of the products required for house dust mite avoidance can be obtained locally in drugstores, department stores and hardware stores.

1-800-422-DUST  
1-800-322-1110  
1-800-771-ACHO  
1-800-882-4110  
1-800-621-5545  
1-800-522-1448