

Managing Indoor Allergen Culprits

Millions of people suffer allergy symptoms caused by indoor allergens such as dust mite droppings, animal dander, cockroach droppings and molds. While it is impossible to avoid these allergens, there are ways you can minimize exposure to them.

Controlling Dust Mites

Who could guess that a microscopic-sized allergen could cause major problems?

- Because so much time is spent in the bedroom, it is essential to reduce mite levels there. Encase mattresses, box springs and pillows in special allergen-proof fabric covers or airtight, zippered plastic covers. Bedding should be washed weekly in hot water (130° F) and dried in a hot dryer.
- Keep humidity low by using a dehumidifier or air conditioning.
- Wall-to-wall carpeting should be removed as much as possible. Throw rugs may be used if they are regularly cleaned.
- People with allergies should use a vacuum with a HEPA (high-efficiency particulate) filter or a double-layered bag, and possibly wear a dust mask-or ask someone else to vacuum.

Controlling Pet Allergens

Contrary to popular opinion, people are not allergic to an animal's hair, but to an allergen found in the saliva, dander (dead skin flakes) or urine of an animal with fur.

- All dogs and cats carry these proteins, so no breed is allergy-free.
- If you cannot avoid exposure, try to minimize contact and keep the pet out of the bedroom and other rooms where you spend a great deal of time.
- As with dust mites, vacuum carpets often or replace carpet with a hardwood floor, tile or linoleum.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Dust mites thrive in 70° F or above temperatures and humidity levels above 75 percent.
- Even the cleanest homes have allergens lurking.



Controlling Cockroaches

An allergen in cockroach droppings is a main trigger of asthma symptoms.

- Block all areas where roaches could enter your home, including crevices, wall cracks and windows. Cockroaches need water to survive, so fix and seal all leaky faucets and pipes. Have an exterminator go through the house to eliminate any remaining roaches.
- Keep food covered and put pet food dishes away after pets are done eating. Vacuum and sweep the floor after meals, and take out garbage and recyclables. Use lidded garbage containers in the kitchen. Wash dishes after use and clean under stoves, refrigerators or toasters where crumbs can accumulate. Wipe off the stove and other kitchen surfaces and cupboards regularly.

Controlling Indoor Molds

- Indoor molds and mildew need dampness, such as found in basements, bathrooms or anywhere with leaks. Remove mold on hard surfaces with water, detergent and 5% bleach (do not mix with other cleaners). For clothing, wash with soap and water.
- Repair and seal leaking roofs or pipes. Use a dehumidifier in damp basements, but empty the water and clean units regularly to prevent mildew from forming. Don't carpet concrete or damp floors, and avoid storing items in damp areas.

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To the Point

Indoor allergies are caused by dust mite droppings, animal dander, cockroach droppings and molds. No home is allergen-free, but keeping yours clean and dry are the best ways to minimize exposure to these allergens.