



Minimising exposure to House Dust Mites

House Dust Mites of several species are microscopic arthropods present in every home. Mites are relatives of the spider, but much smaller creatures (about ten mites fit on a period!). On average, a gram (the weight of a paper clip) of dust contains 100-500 mites. Adults live approximately 2-3 months during which time a female mite may lay 25-30 eggs every three weeks. Mite populations in the UK appear to peak in July and August, and allergen levels are lowest in April and May.

Mites feed off of skin scales and dander shed by humans and pets. Because they feed on skin scales, mites love bedding, carpeting, upholstered furniture, clothing, closets, stuffed dog toys, and automobile seats . . . anywhere they can find a hiding place with the likelihood of skin dander being present. Dust mites also require a relatively high humidity in the home to truly thrive.

Humans and animals react to the protein within the mite's body and their digestive wastes (faeces). Dust allergy is not a sign of a dirty home. Although extra effort in removing as much dust and hair build-up as possible can aid in decreasing the amount of allergen exposure to humans and pets, homes with carpeting and high humidity will always have some dust mites. Vigorously vacuuming will not reduce the number of dust mites present deep within carpeting and mattresses and may actually result in a greater amount of dust within the air, making symptoms worse. The sleeping area (mattress, carpeted floor beside bed, sofa or overstuffed chair) has been proven the most important area for allergens.

Here are a few suggestions that can be used to reduce house dust mites in your home.

1. Keep the pet out of the bedroom or off the bed, since this is where the mites are most numerous. If this is not possible, use plastic or Gor-Tex mattress covers or some impermeable barrier for your pet's sleeping area on the bed and wash and heat-dry bed linens weekly. Do not use a bed spread that can not be laundered. It is also best to replace bedspreads, pillows, and mattress covers regularly. Feather pillows are "house dust mite hotels!" . . . Don't use them around your allergic pet. Keep closet doors shut.
2. Dog beds should be covered in plastic or Gor-Tex or filled with cedar or treated with insecticides inside the cover. Covers should be washed frequently and the beds aired out or put in the dryer. You should replace all old beds now and replace the new ones at least every six months unless the whole bed, including stuffing, can be laundered weekly.
3. Clean the pet quarters thoroughly on a regular basis, vacuuming frequently and dusting with a damp or oiled cloth. Ideally, cleaning should be done when the dust-sensitive individual or pet is not at home. Vacuuming and dusting stir up the allergens and increases exposure to them.
4. Carpeting provides a breeding ground for mites. Eliminate it whenever possible, or keep your pet out of the carpeted rooms. If you must have carpeting, low-pile types are preferable. Scatter rugs that can be washed and heat dried once a week are better. Wooden, seamless vinyl, or linoleum floor coverings are best because they can be cleaned thoroughly. Regular flea treatments are probably effective for mites in carpets and rugs and sodium polyborate or benzyl benzoate powders are available for killing house dust mites. However, the allergens are persistent even if the mites are killed. There are also sprays for removal of allergens from carpets, but their efficacy is questionable.
5. When possible, chose closed bookshelves and curios instead of open shelves, washable curtains instead of blinds and heavy draperies, furniture with simple designs instead of ornately curved

pieces, easily cleaned decorations instead of dried flowers or straw, wooden or plastic furniture instead of upholstery. Upholstered furniture used by your pet should be covered in a plastic, rubberized, or Gortex throw cloth (an anti-bed wetting mattress pad can be used).

6. Use air conditioning or central heat to keep household humidity low. Frequently change or clean filters on air condition or heating systems. Use HEPA filters in vacuums, dehumidifiers air conditioners and heaters.

7. If the home does not have central air conditioning, consider installing a room air conditioner. This will decrease humidity, as well as reduce the amount of outdoor pollen inside the home.

8. Eliminate decorative stuffed pillows and toys, since they harbour mites. Stuffed dog toys should be replaced with new ones that can be laundered and dried weekly.

9. Reduce or eliminate houseplants as they increase humidity.

10. Do not confine your dog to the laundry room, bathroom, utility room, or other high humidity areas of the home.

11. Avoid dusty dog foods, and keep all cat litter boxes covered. Try to use non-dusty and non-tree cat litter if possible.