

What Is a Dust Mite?

They are too small to see with your eyes alone. Under a microscope, they look like white bugs. They have eight legs, so they are not insects, but arthropods, like spiders. They also like humidity levels of 70 to 80 percent. They are all well adapted to the environment inside your home. They feed mainly on the tiny flakes of human skin that people shed each day. These flakes work their way deep into the inner layers of furniture, carpets, bedding and even stuffed toys. These are the places where mites thrive. An average adult person may shed up to 1.5 grams of skin in a day. This is enough to feed one million dust mites!

What Are the Symptoms of Dust Mite Allergy?

Common dust mite allergy symptoms include:

- Sneezing
- Runny nose
- Itchy, red or watery eyes
- Stuffy nose
- Itchy nose, mouth or throat
- Postnasal drip (a flow of mucus from behind your nose into your throat)
- Cough
- If your dust mite allergy triggers your asthma, you may also experience:
- Difficulty breathing
- Chest tightness or pain
- A whistling or wheezing sound when breathing out
- Trouble sleeping caused by shortness of breath, coughing or wheezing

How Does a Doctor Diagnose Dust Mite Allergy?

- If your doctor thinks you have a dust mite allergy, they may suggest a skin or blood test. If you have symptoms year-round, you could have a dust mite allergy.
- **-Skin Prick Test (SPT)**
In prick/scratch testing, a small drop of the possible allergen is placed on your skin. Then the nurse or doctor will lightly prick or scratch the spot with a needle through the drop. If you are allergic to the substance, you will develop redness, swelling and itching at the test site within 20 minutes. You may also see a wheal. A wheal is a raised, round area that looks like a hive. Usually, the larger the wheal, the more likely you are to be allergic to the allergen.

- **-Specific IgE Blood Test**

Your doctor will take a blood sample or send you to a laboratory. Then they measure the amount of antibodies your blood produces to attack the allergens. This test is called Specific IgE (This was previously and commonly referred to as RAST) As with skin testing, a positive blood test to an allergen does not necessarily mean that an allergen caused your symptoms.

What Is the Treatment for Dust Mite Allergy?

The most important step is to avoid dust mites as much as possible. Limiting your exposure to dust mites will reduce your symptoms. However, it's nearly impossible to completely get rid of dust mites in your environment. You may also need medicines to control symptoms. Certain over-the-counter and prescription medicines may help reduce dust mite allergy symptoms.

- **Antihistamines** are available as pills, liquids or nose sprays. They can relieve sneezing and itching in the nose and eyes. They also reduce a runny nose and, to a lesser extent, nasal stuffiness.
- **Nasal corticosteroids** are a type of nose spray. They reduce swelling in your nose and block allergic reactions. They are the most effective medicine type for allergic rhinitis because they can reduce all symptoms, including nasal congestion. Nasal corticosteroids have few side effects.
- **Decongestants** are available as pills, liquids, nose sprays or drops. They help shrink the lining of the nasal passages and relieve stuffiness. Use decongestant nose drops and sprays only for a short time. Oral decongestants can cause side effects such as sleeplessness and increased blood pressure in some people. Consider checking with your doctor before using them.
- **Allergy Shots - Subcutaneous Immunotherapy (SCIT)** is an effective treatment that has been around for more than 100 years. SCIT is a series of shots that have progressively larger amounts of allergen. An injection of the allergen goes into the fat under your skin about once a week during the initial phase of treatment. Many patients get complete relief of their allergies after being on SCIT for one to three years. Many physicians will continue SCIT for a period of five

or more years. SCIT can provide long-lasting symptom relief. Many people experience benefits for at least several years after the shots stop.

NOTE: Many people with a dust mite allergy do not get complete relief from medicines. This means they may consider immunotherapy (allergy shots). Immunotherapy is a long-term treatment that can help prevent or reduce the severity of allergic reactions. It can reduce the course of allergic disease by changing your body's immune response to allergens

How Can I Prevent Allergic Reactions to Dust Mites?

- **Cover mattresses and pillows in zippered dust-proof covers.** These covers are made of a material with pores too small to let dust mites and their waste product through
- **Wash your sheets and blankets weekly in hot water.**
- **Get rid of all types of fabric that mites love and that you cannot easily wash regularly in hot water.** Avoid wall-to-wall carpeting, curtains, blinds, upholstered furniture and down-filled covers and pillows in the bedroom. Put roll-type shades on your windows instead of curtains.
- **Have someone without a dust mite allergy clean your bedroom.** If this is not possible, wear a filtering mask when dusting or vacuuming. Many drug stores carry these items. Dusting and vacuuming stir up dust. So, try to do these chores when you can stay out of the bedroom for a while afterward.
- **Vacuuming is not enough to remove all dust mites and their waste.** A large amount of the dust mite population may remain because they live deep inside the stuffing of sofas, chairs, mattresses, pillows and carpeting.
- **Keep the humidity in your home less than 50 percent.** Use a dehumidifier and/or air conditioner to do this.
- **Use a HEPA filter with your central furnace and air conditioning unit.** This can help trap dust mites from your entire home. Freestanding air cleaners only filter air in a limited area. Avoid devices that treat air with heat, electrostatic ions or ozone.

DUST MITES

If you have allergies or asthma, a tiny creature living in your home could be making big problems for you. Although you can't see them, you may be having an allergic reaction to them. They are dust mites and they live in many homes throughout the world.

Dust mites may be the most common trigger of year-round allergies and asthma. They are on every continent except Antarctica. It may not be possible to rid your home entirely of these creatures. But there are ways in which you can lessen your allergic reactions to them.



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