



DUST MITES - NATURE'S GARBAGE MEN



Many asthmatic and allergic people are allergic to dust. **Dust** is a disgusting stew of many particles including ash, fibers, fingernail filings, food crumbs, glass bits, oil, soot, paint chips, plant parts, pollen, animal and human skin cells, dander and hair, fungal spores, soil, stone particles, wood shavings, etc. Dust exists almost everywhere both inside and outside and is carried on air currents. **Dust Mites** are foul living creatures that live in dust. Microscopic, they stay close to ground level and feed off of your dead skin cells (we lose more than 2 grams of skin cells a day or almost 2 pounds a year). Mites congregate and make a buffet of these dead cells that are found on your mattress and pillows, upholstered furniture and the carpeting we lay on, all perfect loofahs for our dead skin. While they nibble on our cells, we inhale the dried and shriveled bodies of the dead mites including their feces, which contains the enzyme that causes an allergic reaction. Disgusting? Indeed.

Normally, dust mites live in warm summer months and die in cold winter, but warm, humid conditions in bedrooms makes an ideal year-round spa for these creatures that cause asthma and allergy sufferers to wheeze, cough, sneeze or have runny noses. It's impossible to completely eradicate all of them in your world, but there are steps to reduce their number in your home, especially your bedroom, which will reduce their impact on asthma and allergies. To create a dust mite free bedroom, you must reduce the number of surfaces on which dust can collect. In addition to getting medical care for your dust allergy and/or asthma, the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (**NIAID**) suggests the following:

- ▶ Empty the room and clean it thoroughly. If whoever is cleaning has the dust allergy, wear a mask while doing these tasks. Empty and clean all closets and, if possible, store contents elsewhere and seal closets. The more surfaces there are, the more dust has to collect upon. Store your clothing in zippered, plastic bags and put shoes in boxes off the floor if you cannot store them elsewhere. Remove carpeting, drapes and curtains if possible and replace them with washable blinds or shades. Clean and scrub the woodwork and floors thoroughly to remove all traces of dust then keep the doors and windows to the bedroom closed until the dust-sensitive person is ready to use the room.
- ▶ To maintain a bedroom as free of dust mites as possible, clean the room thoroughly and completely once a week. Clean floors, furniture, tops of doors, fan blades, window frames, sills and screens, etc., with a damp cloth or oil mop. Don't use a "feather" type duster as that spreads the dust. Vacuum carpet and upholstery regularly, ideally with a HEPA filter vacuum. If you have them, wash curtains often at 130°F. Ventilate the room, but don't keep windows open, use AC instead.
- ▶ Carpeting makes dust control impossible. Although shag carpets are the worst type to have if you are dust sensitive, all carpets trap dust. Therefore, healthcare experts recommend wood, tile, or linoleum. Treating carpets with tannic acid eliminates some dust mite allergen. But tannic acid isn't as effective as removing the carpet because it is irritating to some people and must be applied repeatedly.
- ▶ Keep only one bed in the room and encase box springs, mattress and pillows in zippered dust or allergen-proof covers or encasements. Scrub bed springs outside the room. If you must have a second bed in the room, prepare it in the same manner.
- ▶ Only use washable fabrics on the bed. Use a synthetic -like Dacron - mattress pad and pillow. Avoid fuzzy wool blankets or feather, down or wool comforters and mattress pads. If you do use down pillows, use encasements for these also. Sheets, blankets, and other bedclothes should be washed weekly in water that is at least 130°F. Lower temperatures won't kill dust mites.

▶ A dehumidifier may help, because dust mites need high humidity to live and grow. Take special care to clean the unit frequently with a weak bleach solution (1 cup bleach in 1 gallon water) or use a commercial product to prevent mold growth. Although low humidity may reduce dust mite levels, it might irritate your nose and lungs.

▶ Keep toys that accumulate dust out of a child's bedroom and avoid stuffed toys; use only washable toys of wood, rubber, metal, or plastic or the new washable stuffed animals. Storing stuffed animals in sealed plastic bags helps to reduce dust exposure; placing stuffed animals in the freezer will help kill dust mites. Keep warm-blooded pets out of the bedroom at all times and don't allow your pets to sit on upholstered furniture.

▶ Since we spend so much time lounging on upholstered furniture or playing on carpeted floors, there are often MORE dead skin cells for dust mites to munch on in the living area of our homes than in the bed. It helps to eliminate as many "dust collecting" surfaces as possible in our homes: store collectibles or books in enclosed cases if possible; reduce the amount of upholstered furniture in your home and replace carpeting with wood, tile or linoleum. Sweep with a HEPA filter vacuum at least once a week.

This seems to be a lot of work, but once it becomes routine, the pay-off is reduced asthma and allergy symptoms and a better night's sleep for all.

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