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AIR DUCT CLEANING: IS IT THE ANSWER FOR YOUR ALLERGY SYMPTOMS?

* Every home is different; it is impossible to advise having your air ducts professionally cleaned just because someone in the household suffers from allergies to dust and mold. *No studies have ever determined that duct cleaning has improved anyone's health or that "dusty" ducts circulate the dust back into the home.* The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) DOES NOT recommend professional air duct cleaning except under special circumstances. For fuel burning furnaces, they do recommend they be inspected yearly for threats of carbon monoxide poisoning.

* It's normal for air ducts to collect dust while they function in circulating air; usually this dust can be cleaned by vacuuming the registers. If you **look into the ducts and don't see or smell visible signs of mold growth** or large amounts of dust, (think furry creature in there) then **cleaning the ducts won't help relieve your allergy symptoms**. If there is visible heavy mold growth on the inside sheet metal surface of the ducts or other parts of the cleaning system, or if the ducts are infested with rodents, insects or their droppings, or if ducts are clogged with excessive dust and these particles are being released into the air then there is a good chance the ducts should be cleaned professionally.

* **To alleviate and help reduce allergy symptoms, prevention is the best action. To prevent dirt getting in the system:** 1) Get the best, most efficient air filter you can find and use it in the system, changing it or cleaning it frequently 2) Check that you have all necessary filters on your unit and that these are not clogged 3) Each year during system maintenance, ask that cooling coils and drain pans be thoroughly cleaned 4) If you're doing any indoor building or renovations, don't use the heating/cooling system during the process, plus cover air ducts and registers with plastic so construction dirt won't enter your system 5) Dust and vacuum your home regularly and frequently to prevent any build-up in the system – at least once a week.

* **To prevent mold from getting in the system:** 1) Fix any water leaks 2) Remove any standing water and correct the reason for standing water by making sure drain pans slope toward the drain 3) Some older systems still use flexible hoses and these can either rot and leak or clog and leak so have those hoses inspected and replaced if necessary 4) If the unit has a built-in humidifier, follow the manufacturer's direction to clean and maintain it properly 5) If any fiberglass or other insulation materials get wet or smell moldy, seek and repair the water source and replace the insulation 6) Don't use steam cleaning or any other moisture system to clean your duct work 7) Some manufacturers recommend adding a cup of bleach into the "hose" system each month to prevent mold growth. Check your operating manual or ask your service agent if this is good for your system. The bleach kills/prevents mold build-up.

* **Be a savvy consumer if you do decide to have your ducts cleaned professionally:** 1) Learn all you can about air duct cleaning – a good source <http://www.epa.gov/iaq/pubs/airduct.html> 2) If you think poor indoor air quality is making your allergy symptoms worse, first check for other sources of indoor air pollution. Ask AAFA-TX for more information.

3) Ask the contractor to:

- a) show his license – Texas and several other states require one
- b) show you any mold or biological contamination they say exists – is it really mold?
- c) provide references – and then check them!

4) Get at least 3 contractor estimates

5) Find out what your ducts are made of – sheet metal, flex duct, or fiberglass duct board or a combination since each type requires a different type of cleaning

6) Don't allow the use of Biocides unless there is proven mold growth: be certain they will be applied strictly according to label directions. Generally, you and your pets should leave the house if biocides are being used

7) Generally, sealants shouldn't be applied

8) Adopt a regular maintenance plan to service your system yearly, change or clean filters regularly (set a date to do this – perhaps the first of every month), check for leaks to prevent moisture and add bleach monthly, if this is safe for your system.

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