

Why Doctors Strongly Recommend Allergen Avoidance as an Important Part of Asthma and Allergy Treatment

Allergy and asthma physicians tell us that people are most allergic to dust and dust mites, mold spores, pollens, and animal dander. All of these allergens have two things in common: they are tiny particles that float through the air, and they primarily have to be breathed in to cause allergy symptoms.

A common mistake made by allergy sufferers is to assume that if you can't avoid all the allergens all the time, there is no point in trying to avoid any of them. But, according to some allergy physicians, breathing in airborne allergens is a cumulative problem. Think of your immune system as a bucket. It takes in allergens and starts filling up. The symptoms, however, don't appear until your "bucket" has filled up and begins to overflow. That's when you become miserable.

Allergy physicians have many ways of dealing with this problem. High on the list are various environmental controls to help you avoid enough allergens so that your bucket won't overflow. Whether you are allergic to one or several substances, successful avoidance of even one of them can keep your bucket from overflowing.

For example, let's say you have a diagnosed sensitivity to dust mite waste – the most common allergy of them all. Dust mite allergens are primarily a bedroom problem. Practicing simple avoidance can make your bedroom almost free of dust mite allergen. Now, while sleeping, you're not breathing in this invisible allergen all night. The result – you may not have symptoms, like a stuffy nose or red eyes, in the morning. Plus, the 8-10 hours of allergen-free sleep will have given your system a chance to recover so that you might even start the day with an "empty bucket." In fact, with conscientious, ongoing avoidance measures – coupled with your doctor's other recommendations – your bucket may not reach "overflow" again.

And wouldn't that be nice?



A stuffy nose and red, itchy eyes can make you miserable.

Allergen avoidance can help.

The Environmental Controls Most Commonly Recommended by Allergy Physicians

Mattress, Pillow, Box Spring, & Comforter Encasings



If you have dust mite allergies, encasings are an absolute must according to most allergists. Why? Because mite-proof encasings are complete barriers against dust mite allergen,

which is found by the millions in mattresses, pillows, box springs, and comforters! Without encasings, as you move during sleep, these allergens are stirred up from your bedding and are breathed in directly. With encasings, this harmful process is stopped. The invisible particles are blocked by the encasing and are no longer breathed in all night.

So called "hypoallergenic" pillows still need to be encased because that phrase only means that the materials used to construct the pillow are not known to cause an allergic reaction. Dust mites are still found in these pillows. In the past, people have resisted encasings because they were made of plastic or vinyl and were crinkly and hot. But softer and more durable fabric encasings are now available that eliminate these discomforts. Some of the newest mite-proof encasings use tightly woven barrier fabric to protect you from this powerful allergen. In fact, these breathable encasings are so cool and comfortable that most people don't even realize they are sleeping on them.

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Washing of Sheets, Blankets, Mattress Pads, Etc.



Eliminating dust mites and their allergen from sheets, blankets, comforters and mattress pads is simple. Just wash these items every 10-14 days in hot (140° F) water. Washing

in hot water kills the microscopic mite and removes the allergen. High quality blankets (like the Vellux® brand) are available that can take 50 or more washings and still look and feel like new. Unlike other blankets, they won't shrink, pill or mat. For added protection, consider using a special laundry product, which will make cold water washing possible. If washing your comforter is impractical, you can encase it just like you would your mattress. By the way, it is important to know that dust mites are common to almost all households and have little to do with good or bad housekeeping.

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Powerful Room Air Cleaners



High Efficiency Particulate Air (HEPA) cleaners are considered to be the standard in room air cleaning. One powerful unit can easily reduce offending airborne allergen in a large

room by 50% and keep the room clean as long

as it remains running. HEPA air cleaners do not lose efficiency and require only occasional filter changes. The continuous air movement from the HEPA filter has a ventilation effect. It moves allergens into the air cleaner, thereby continuously reducing the reservoir of allergens in room air to help you avoid these offending particles. It's important to know that airborne dust mite allergen near the filter is removed, even though this allergen stays airborne for only 20 minutes or so after disturbance.

HEPA air cleaners come with different power levels. Air cleaning power is very important and is measured in air changes per hour (the number of times per hour the entire volume of air in the room can be filtered). The more often the air is cleaned in the room, the fewer allergens remain. Cleaning a room's air ten or more times per hour is ideal. However, most experts agree HEPA air cleaners should have the capacity to clean your bedroom's air no less than six times per hour. Beware of weak HEPA air cleaners – those that clean a room's air less than five times per hour. Despite having a HEPA filter, such units simply do not have the power to pull air from more than a few feet away. The remainder of the air in the room stays unfiltered and loaded with allergens. Recent advancements in technology are producing powerful machines that are actually very quiet while running, even on the highest speed!

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Vent Filters



These are inexpensive filtering kits that cover the incoming air vent. They are designed to minimize all kinds of airborne allergens from entering a room from other areas of the house via the ductwork. Although not nearly as efficient as a powerful room air cleaner, they are a great start.

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Anti-Allergen Sprays & Powders



Safe for you, your pets & the environment, there are sprays available that denature (or neutralize) dust mite & other indoor allergens in carpets and upholstered furniture. These sprays do not kill dust mites, so the mites continue to produce the allergen, making regularly scheduled treatments necessary. Some of these sprays use a 3% tannic acid solution while others use newer technologies. Anti-Allergen Solution™, for example, oxidizes allergens on carpet and fabrics, so they are harmless if you inhale them.

There are also several types of powders designed for use on carpeting since it is a favorite place for mites to live. A moist powder called X-Mite™ is sold as an all-in-one product that denatures allergens using 3% tannic acid while it cleans and freshens carpets. Dustmite And Flea Control™ is perfectly natural and harmless to your family and pets but is known to kill dust mites as well as fleas. Because it kills mites and fleas, treatments are only recommended twice a year. Another way to control allergens in your carpet is frequent vacuuming, but consider using a True HEPA vacuum cleaner for best results. If using a bagless vacuum, allergy sufferers should wear a mask when emptying the dirt collection bin.

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Pet Allergy Avoidance



Pets should be washed with an allergen-reducing shampoo or treated with a dander removal product like Allerpet™ every 10 days to two weeks. This removes much of the allergenic dander from the fur before it becomes airborne. Do not let your pet sleep in the same room with you. Powerful room air cleaners and HEPA vacuuming will further reduce the presence of this allergen.

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Controlling Humidity



High humidity (above 45-50%) promotes dust mite and mold spore growth. Running an air conditioner or high-efficiency dehumidifier can help drop humidity levels. Kits are available that test for the presence of molds. It is also wise to use a humidity gauge to monitor moisture levels in your home.

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Whole House Air Filters & Cleaners



Most forced air heating and cooling systems use 1" thick filters, and many people still use the inexpensive, fiberglass, disposable type. Allergy sufferers should consider using a more efficient furnace filter that does a much better job of removing small, airborne particles. There are two main types available, namely: Permanent and Pleated. The permanent types are good long-term investments, will usually last the life of your furnace and require monthly washing. Pleated furnace filters, like the Filtrete® brand from 3M, are by far the most efficient filters, but they are not washable and have to be changed every 3 months or so, depending on the brand. Although not as efficient as True HEPA air cleaners, permanent or pleated furnace filters do affect your entire home. However, since they cannot filter unless the furnace fan is running, it is advisable to run it often to get maximum filtration. There are other methods for filtering the air in your entire home, but they are usually very expensive and require installation by a professional technician. If you decide to use a furnace filter, you may still want to cover the vents in your bedroom, because the air has to travel through the ductwork where it can gather any number of allergens.

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Mold/Mildew Preventatives



Mold spore allergies are common because spores grow readily in showers, bathrooms, basements, etc. The airborne spores can be avoided with good continuous air cleaning, but preventing mold spores from growing is also important. Normal cleaning with soap and water or using chlorine bleach is not a long term way of eliminating mold & mildew. Plus, the use of harsh chemicals can be bad for your health as you breathe them in during cleaning. There are now strong, non-toxic, biodegradable

cleaners like All Purpose NAS-12™ that are very easy to use and take very little effort. Products such as No More Mildew™ keep mold spores from re-growing for long periods of time. Such measures are especially important for homes with mold problems in basements and crawl spaces. Furnace systems in those areas can actually pull in these mold spores and distribute them throughout the house via the duct system. Preventatives are inexpensive and simple to use.

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Other Tips For Your Home & Car



Stay away from moldy places. Cut down overgrown shrubbery. Wear a mask when working in the yard. Remove mold and mildew from your roof and deck with a biodegradable cleaner. Avoid sleeping in basement rooms or apartments. Outdoor allergens, such as pollen, mold spores, etc. will find their way into living areas, so keep your house and car closed during the "allergy season" and be sure to wash your clothes after being outside. Run air conditioners and air cleaners as much as possible. Air cleaners are now available for your car, too. If you open the windows of your home, consider using window screen filters. These filters are effective on outdoor pollen and provide a tight fit around the window frame.

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Getting Started – Where To Find These Products

Almost all allergy physicians ask their patients to employ certain environmental controls. The products and procedures are relatively inexpensive, especially when measured against the lifetime of benefits they produce.



Since 1988, National Allergy has distributed the products mentioned in this educational paper through thousands of physicians. Ask your doctor for our *Discount Allergy Supplies* flyer or visit www.NationalAllergy.com. For news, the latest allergen avoidance tips and up-to-date information, as well as exclusive offers and coupons, be sure to subscribe to our free email newsletters at www.NationalAllergy.com/subscribe.



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