House dust mites

The house dust mite is a tiny, almost transparent creature. It is invisible to the naked eye and multiplies rapidly. Its diet includes human skin scales, house dust, moulds and bacteria.

They live in the dust that builds up around the home, and because they thrive by absorbing water through their skin, they love warm, moist conditions.

In winter, when we spend more time in the house, we are likely to have more problems with house dust mites. With the heating on, our homes are an ideal breeding ground for these little creatures.

The house dust mite may look alarming when looked at under a microscope, but this eight-legged creature does not bite, sting or transmit disease. The problem is in the protein contained in their droppings.

Problems they can cause
This can cause problems for adults and children who are sensitive to them, usually people with asthma, rhinitis or eczema.

When the protein enters the body through contact with the mucosal surface of the nose, lining of the eyes or the lining of the airway it stimulates the body’s immune system and can start asthma and allergy symptoms.

How to reduce exposure to them
- Damp dust and vacuum regularly, use a powerful machine with a filter
- Vacuum material furniture, curtains, mattresses and under the bed as well
- Cover the mattress, duvet and pillows with anti-mite barrier covers; you can get these from chemists, department stores, catalogues or from the internet. Covers with a zip that completely cover the mattress are the best type
- Air the duvet each day, remove from the bed and hang over a chair
- Hot wash bedding at 60°, at least once a week
- Wipe clean anti-dust mite barrier covers with a damp (not wet) cloth every time you change the bedding
- Air the mattress thoroughly at least once a month
- Dry washing outside if possible
- If drying inside, use a tumble dryer with an outside vent or use a well ventilated room
- Air and ventilate the house by opening windows daily
- Control dampness and humidity levels in the home by opening windows, using an extractor fan to increase the ventilation and keep the bathroom and kitchen door closed when in use to prevent dampness spreading to other parts of the house
- Exposure to sunlight can kill dust mites. In the summer put the duvet and mattress out in the sun
- Remove soft toys from your child’s bed, especially at night. If your child has a favourite toy, hot wash it regularly and place it in the freezer for several hours to minimize the build up of dust mites
- Keep the house tidy. Put clothes away in wardrobes and avoid clutter on surfaces where dust can gather.

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Some other points to consider

- Use synthetic blankets instead of wool
- Curtains made of light weight materials are less likely to collect dust, washable curtains or vertical blinds are also easier to clean
- Remove any source of damp and water leaks in your home
- When replacing furniture, consider getting furniture that can be wiped down
- When replacing carpets, consider tiled or laminate flooring which are easier to clean and where house dust mites do not thrive.

Things to think about

- If it is a hard surface, wipe it
- If it is washable, wash it with hot water
- If it can’t be wiped or washed, cover it
- If it can’t be wiped, covered or washed, remove it
- If the indoor air is damp, dehumidify it.

If you have any questions or concerns please contact

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