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HOUSE DUST INFORMATION and CONTROL

House dust is a common cause of allergic symptoms and is not to be confused with street dust, which is not typically allergenic. Although you may be starting on allergy shots which contain the house dust allergen, it is important for you to avoid dust as much as possible. Pay attention to where house dust is found and consider the following information and corrective guidelines to decrease your exposure.

What is the house dust mite?

The house dust mite is about the size of a period on a newspaper. It has no sight, no respiratory system and is unable to drink, but lives by absorbing moisture and oxygen from the atmosphere. The actual mite-droppings are a major cause of allergy worldwide.

The dust mite is an ancient creature that has developed a clever method of recycling its food. It uses its droppings as 'food parcels'. Powerful enzymes in the tiny droppings break down hard-to-digest food for later nourishment. These enzymes cause and trigger allergies in humans.

The mite can produce up to 20 droppings a day, which means approximately 2000 during its lifetime of up to 3 to 4 months. The adult female can lay from 60-100 eggs depending upon living conditions, which ideally for breeding mites are warm, dark and damp. Many modern conventional beds provide perfect breeding conditions. Mites are most active and breed successfully at a temp of **75 degrees** Fahrenheit. An important fact to note; the house dust mite's biological make-up is 75% water. It **must** maintain this moisture content to survive. Reducing moisture levels in the indoor air is a threat to its existence.

The house dust mite will not bite. It is a scavenger with a preference for discarded skin scales, but will eat insect scales, bacteria and plant fibers.

Where do dust mites live?

The greatest source of dust mite exposure in the home is the **bedroom mattress**, which provides the best conditions of warmth, humidity and food for their growth. They are also present in **pillows, blankets, carpets, upholstered furniture, curtains and draperies**.

What can be done to control dust mite infestations?

Scientific studies of allergic patients have shown that taking steps to minimize dust mite exposure leads to a decrease in allergic symptoms and a decrease in medication requirements. Emphasis needs to be placed on the bedroom, since people spend on average one-third or more of each 24-hour day there, and because it is the room with the greatest number of dust mites.

Consider implementing some of the following guidelines to reduce your exposure to house dust mites.

- Cover pillows and mattresses with micro-porous mite resistant material.
- Wash **ALL** bedding, including the mattress cover in a washing machine at least once a month with **HOT** water (**130 degrees will kill mites**).
- Avoid wool blankets, quilts, feather pillows and comforters. Pillows should be made of Dacron or other synthetic material and should be replaced every three years.
- Vacuum your mattress monthly.
- The entire house (**especially the bedroom**) should have a thorough initial cleaning from top to bottom with warm soapy water, including the molding, lights, shelves, closets, windows, walls, and floors. **Repeat every 3 to 4 months.**
- Wash any stuffed toys monthly in the washing machine.
- Books, videos and CD's are great dust collectors. Clean them regularly and try to keep them covered.
- Avoid wearing down coats.
- Avoid lying on the floor to watch TV.
- Launder heavy curtains and drapes about once a month, and damp dust window shades and blinds.
- Clean upholstered furniture regularly.
- Consider using an air purifier or installing a high efficiency dehumidifier in bedrooms.
- Change and/or clean furnace filters monthly.
- If using a humidifier in the winter, **avoid over humidification**. Mites grow best at 75-80% relative humidity, and cannot live at less than 50% humidity. Use a humidity gauge to maintain relative humidity at 40-50% if possible.
- Ordinary vacuuming of carpeting is not adequate to remove mites. Frequent vacuuming may remove some dust, but to have the carpets cleaned periodically is the most beneficial.

Other helpful suggestions for the allergic person:

- Cut down on the amount of perfume, cosmetics, flowers, mothballs and insect sprays used in the house.
- Avoid using aerosol sprays.
- Avoid having house pets in the home. If they are unavoidable, keep them out of the allergic person's bedroom.
- Smoking should **NOT** be allowed in the home or vehicle of the allergic person.