



Bayside Medical Group, Inc.

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PEDIATRICS  
ALLERGY TIPS—INDOOR

## Tips to Remember: Indoor Allergens

Millions of people suffer from allergy symptoms caused by indoor allergens, such as house dust mite droppings, animal dander, cockroach droppings and molds. The symptoms are the result of a chain reaction that starts in the genes and is expressed in the immune system.

Your immune system controls how your body defends itself. For instance, if you have an allergy to dust mites, your immune system identifies dust mites as an invader or allergen. Your immune system overreacts by producing antibodies called *Immunoglobulin E (IgE)*. These antibodies travel to cells that release chemicals, causing an allergic reaction. This reaction usually causes symptoms in the nose, lungs, throat, sinuses, ears, lining of the stomach or on the skin.

With the help of an allergist/immunologist, often referred to as an allergist, you can learn what indoor allergens cause your symptoms and make environmental changes to avoid them.

### Controlling Dust Mites

Dust mite allergens—the most common trigger of allergy and asthma symptoms—are found throughout the house, but thrive in bedding and soft furnishings. Because so much time is spent in the bedroom, it is essential to reduce mite levels there.

Encase mattresses, box springs and pillows in special allergen-proof fabric covers or airtight, zippered plastic covers. Bedding should be washed weekly in hot water (130° F) and dried in a hot dryer. Cover comforters and pillows that can't be regularly washed with allergen-proof covers.

Keep humidity low by using a dehumidifier or air conditioning. Wall-to-wall carpeting should be removed as much as possible. Instead, throw rugs may be used if they are regularly washed or dry cleaned.

People with allergies should use a vacuum with a HEPA (high-efficiency particulate) filter or

a double-layered bag, and wear a dust mask—or ask someone else to vacuum.

### Controlling Pet Allergens

People are not allergic to an animal's hair, but to an allergen found in the saliva, dander (dead skin flakes) or urine of an animal with fur. Usually, symptoms occur within minutes.

For some people, symptoms build and become most severe eight to 12 hours after contact with the animal. People with severe allergies can experience reactions in public places if dander has been transported on pet owners' clothing.

There are no "hypoallergenic" breeds of cats or dogs. The same is true for any animal with fur, so it's best to remove the pet from the home and avoid contact if you're highly allergic. Keeping an animal outdoors is only a partial solution, since homes with pets in the yard still have higher concentrations of animal allergens. Before getting a pet, ask your allergist to determine if you are allergic to animals.

If you cannot avoid exposure, try to minimize contact and keep the pet out of the bedroom and other rooms where you spend a great deal of time. While dander and saliva are the source of cat and dog allergens, urine is the source of allergens from rabbits, hamsters, mice and guinea pigs; ask a non-allergic family member to clean the animal's cage.

As with dust mites, vacuum carpets often or replace carpet with a hardwood floor, tile or linoleum. Some studies have found that using a HEPA air cleaner may reduce animal allergen exposure.

### Controlling Cockroaches

An allergen in cockroach droppings is a main trigger of asthma symptoms, especially for children living in densely populated, urban neighborhoods.

Block all areas where roaches could enter the

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home, including crevices, wall cracks and windows. Cockroaches need water to survive, so fix and seal all leaky faucets and pipes. Have an exterminator go through the house when your family and pets are gone to eliminate any remaining roaches.

Keep food in lidded containers and put pet food dishes away after your pets are done eating. Vacuum and sweep the floor after meals, and take out garbage and recyclables. Use lidded garbage containers in the kitchen. Wash dishes immediately after use and clean under stoves, refrigerators or toasters where crumbs can accumulate. Wipe off the stove and other kitchen surfaces and cupboards regularly.

### **Controlling Indoor Molds**

Indoor molds and mildew need dampness, such as found in basements, bathrooms or anywhere with leaks. Clean up mold growth on hard surfaces with water, detergent and, if necessary, 5% bleach (do not mix with other cleaners). Then dry the area completely. If mold covers an area more than 10 square feet, consider hiring an indoor environmental professional. For clothing, washing with soap and water is best. If moldy items cannot be cleaned and dried, throw them away.

Promptly repair and seal leaking roofs or pipes. Using dehumidifiers in damp basements may be helpful, but empty the water and clean units regularly to prevent mildew from forming. All rooms, especially basements, bathrooms and kitchens, require ventilation and cleaning to deter mold and mildew growth. Avoid carpeting on concrete or damp floors, and storing items in damp areas.

See your allergist for more suggestions.

### **Healthy Tips**

- Your allergist can help you identify things in your home, workplace or school that may be making your asthma or allergies worse.
- Keep your home clean and dry to help make it “allergen-free.”
- Focus on sites where allergens accumulate—bedding, carpet and upholstered furniture.
- Weekly vacuuming can help. Use a vacuum with a HEPA filter or double bags.
- Keep humidity low by using an air conditioner or dehumidifier.
- Fix leaks to avoid mold, and clean or remove moldy materials promptly.
- Avoid pests by keeping food in sealed containers and using covered garbage cans.

### **Feel Better. Live Better.**

An allergist/immunologist, often referred to as an allergist, is a pediatrician or internist with at least two additional years of specialized training in the diagnosis and treatment of problems such as allergies, asthma, autoimmune diseases and the evaluation and treatment of patients with recurrent infections, such as immunodeficiency diseases.

The right care can make the difference between suffering with an allergic disease and feeling better. By visiting the office of an allergist, you can expect an accurate diagnosis, a treatment plan that works and educational information to help you manage your disease.