



## **YOUR ALLERGY FREE HOME**

Many of 'us', allergy sufferers or parents of allergy sufferers spend a great deal of time and thought worrying about all the possible triggers and cross contaminations *outside* of the home. Granted, this is something we must always be diligent about, but it may lead us to neglect or simply assume that everything in our homes is just A OKAY. The cupboards are free of nuts (in a nut allergy situation), the house is cleaned weekly, the dogs are kept groomed etc. Does this sound familiar? Well I am here to inform you that allergy and allergy triggers are lurking in practically every area of your home and while I am not here to incite mass hysteria, there are some basics things that we should know and how to deal with them.

### **MOST COMMON ALLERGENS IN THE HOME**

#### **Dust Mites**

Let's first look at that nasty little creature called the 'dust mite'. While we may feel we are doing our best to keep our homes clean, these pesky things are so incredibly small, that it is almost impossible to keep them at bay, all the time. Dust mite allergy is very common and most food allergy sufferers also suffer from dust mite allergy. Dust mites thrive and multiply in warm, moist environments. Mattresses and bedding offer perfect living conditions for these miniscule creatures. Humans, that being *us*, provide moisture through nighttime perspiration and a dependable supply of food in the form of dead skin flakes. GROSS! So what is happening with these dust mites is that since they are so incredibly small, their droppings are even smaller (14 microns in size) and this means that it takes very minimal disturbance for these droppings, i.e.: the allergen, to become airborne. Once this allergen is circulating in the air, it is easily inhaled into the lungs, where it can trigger an allergic reaction or an asthma attack. When the droppings or allergen come into contact with the skin, this is what we would observe as eczema. In fact when dust mite populations reach greater levels, exposure to the allergen can even bring about sensitivity to an otherwise healthy person!

So what should we do? I don't think any of us want these copious creatures taking over our living spaces. The major obstacle in eradicating mites is the speed at which they breed, factors that make it close to impossible to eliminate an entire population from the home. Each mite can only survive for four months, but in that time frame, and with ideal conditions (warm and moist) it produces around 200 times its own weight in droppings

and lays around 80 eggs. YUCK! They are in our beds, our soft furnishings, our carpets, our curtains and even our children's furry toys. Oh no!

What can we do? There are solutions! The approach is two-fold. We must first try to eradicate all of the existing dust mites (which is virtually impossible) but we will do our best. Secondly we must work to attack the new allergens from invading our homes.

In the bedroom, the best way to deal with existing dust mites is to simply encase your mattress in a plastic mattress cover or a poly-cotton blend cover for a more comfortable feeling.

Down, wool, feather pillows, quilts and blankets are also where dust mites are living.

Try encasing these as well and keep the outside lining clean with a damp cloth.

Wherever possible, replace wall-to-wall carpeting with hard wood flooring and replace curtains with easily wipe able blinds or shutters. Minimize shelving. Store clothing in closed cupboards or drawers. Damp dust all surfaces frequently. Hang linens outside to dry on a sunny day. Dust mites cannot survive after 2 hours of exposure to ultra-violet light.

And there is one final word on dust mites that is encouraging! Dust mites are dissolved and destroyed at high temperatures (130-140F or 55-60 C). Bed linen should be washed this way on a weekly basis. There are also service providers of dust mite destroyers by encasing all of your belongs in a huge envelope and cranking up the heat until all dust mites are eradicated!! If you don't want to go through all the work, just call the professionals! But remember, a home must be well maintained or dust mites will come back and multiply.

## **Pets**

This will be hard for all of you pet lovers out there, but realistically speaking, if you or your child has a pet allergy, they should not be in the home at all. Cats come into first place as the top domestic animal allergen. 'Felix domesticus' is found in saliva, dead skin cells and fur dander. It is spread over the coat as the cat washes itself and then it dries on the fur. Particles containing allergen are very fine which means they float around in the air too! They remain in the air for many hours and are easily inhaled. If not being inhaled, the allergen sticks to walls and ceilings. This can be found even after the pet has left the house! Yikes!

Dog allergen is most found in saliva and dander. Particles tend to be larger so remain airborne for shorter periods of time.

Guinea pigs, hamsters etc. produce allergens in their urine, which become airborne once the animal scurries around the areas it has urinated. Birds are offering their allergen through their feathers.

So, if you love pets, must have them, here are the best ways to manage the allergens. Do not let pets sleep in the bedroom of the allergic person and certainly not in their bed! Keep the windows open as much as possible to release these floating allergens. Wash your pets bedding every week. Keep your pets groomed frequently (ideally twice a week). If you are moving into a house where an animal once lived, wash all walls and ceilings. Remember cat allergen can cling for years!

### **Molds, Fungi and Spores**

I'm not sure about you, but even the names of these allergens send shivers up my spine. It's not as if any of us believe we are living amongst such things and actually becoming sick from it! And for an allergic person, this is just a horrible situation.

Here are the ugly facts about molds in your home. *All* homes reveal some mold. The problem occurs when the mold is exposed to dampness. Rising damp is seen in old buildings with structural faults and even in new buildings, where they are airtight, is providing ideal conditions for fungal life to flourish. What is happening to the allergy sufferer is that the mold releases spores and these cause wheezing and asthma in children. They have also linked mold spores to high blood pressure and breathlessness in adults. And of course, these spores are airborne too and produce millions of these seed-like spores, which float in the air and are inhaled.

Molds can also be found in the beds of your children or anywhere that the bed was exposed to moisture. They are hiding their spores beneath wallpaper and in the soil of houseplants.

Here is what we can do to alleviate the amount of molds in our homes. Maintain a well ventilated, low-humidity home. Open the windows everyday! Yes, even here in Canada! In damp rooms (i.e.: basement) invest in a dehumidifier. Regularly clean surfaces that are prone to molds, kitchens and bathrooms. Try to keep a door open when cooking or showering to let some of that moisture out! Reduce the amount of houseplants you have. I know they're pretty and oxygen releasing, but they are breeding grounds for mold. Regularly empty and clean your garbage bins. That's just a perfect place for molds to stagnate. Wash or eliminate bathmats frequently. I say, just be done with bathmats altogether and move on. Your bathroom will thank you. Not to mention the allergy sufferer in the home.

### **Cockroaches**

So just when you thought you had heard enough about disgusting mites, molds, spores and saliva living in synchronicity with you in your home, it just got worse. Cockroaches. Ugh. These also list very high on the list of most common household allergens. Cockroaches are mostly associated with hot, crowded, tropical climates. But with the invention of central heating they are making their way north. An estimated 60% of

Asthmatic Americans have tested positive to cockroach allergy! Cockroach allergy is a protein found both on the insects' body and in its droppings. So even if it's dead, beware! Again, these allergens become airborne with normal house dust, then inhaled. And here is a real oozy for you. Because cockroaches contaminate food with their excrement, allergens (or let's say it for what it is, *cockroach excrement*) are also potentially being ingested in your meals. Yum.

Lower on the scale of most common household allergies are pollens, latex, insect sting bites and nickel allergy (jewelry). Pollen is very hard to avoid and most allergy sufferers do just that during that time of year, suffer. Invest in a good supply of Benedryl to get through that time of year.

Insect sting allergy sufferers must NEVER leave home without an epi-pen. EVER. This allergy is of the IgE Based group and is anaphylaxis in nature. In other words, it is potentially life threatening.

If you are allergic to latex always check labels carefully because sometimes-even rubber gloves are lined with latex. Like with food, read your labels, and stick to what you know.

Nickel allergy is pretty easy because you can just avoid the metal jewelry and tell yourself or that special person in your life to splurge and buy gold. You have a medical condition for goodness sakes! But unfortunately nickel can be found in trace amounts in certain foods and you must be very careful here. Foods high in nickel include: asparagus, cabbage, beans, corn, mushrooms, peas, tomatoes, spinach, sprouts, peanuts, pears, raisins, rhubarb, tea, herrings, oysters, baking powder, cocoa, wholemeal flour, all canned foods and all foods prepared with nickel utensils. I have not personally met very many people with this allergy, but I can assume that you must be very diligent in your food choices, you must cook from scratch as much as possible and of course, like all of us allergy people, ask your server lots of questions before you eat anything at a restaurant.

I hope I have de-mystified some of the things we simply didn't know about in our homes and gave you some encouragement and ideas for eradicating these pesky inhabitants from our beloved places of enjoyment and rest. I'm still trying to forget about the cockroach excrement in my food! I'll be ok, swear.

Don't forget to keep checking our nut-free community blog where there are more helpful tips and advice!

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