

Allergen Avoidance

DUST MITE

House dust contains dust mites, which are tiny insects which can only be seen under a microscope. They are in everyone's homes and are even more prevalent in Mississippi because of our high humidity. They cannot be eliminated with extermination. They feed on our dead skin cells (dander) that we leave behind on bedding and carpeting. As a result, the highest number of dust mites are found in bedding (mattresses, pillows, and box springs) as well as carpeting and in upholstered furniture. They can cause symptoms throughout the day, even if the only exposure is at night in the bedding.

Methods to decrease dust mite exposure:

- Encase all mattresses, pillows, and box springs with dust mite-proof encasements, which are tightly-woven cotton blends. Common brands are Allersoft, Sleep-Safe, Aller-Ease.
- Wash all linens on high heat (140° F) weekly.
- Avoid comforters, synthetic or down/feather unless they are encased in a dust mite cover.
- Remove stuffed toys from bedroom or store in sealed container (not on the bed).
- Remove carpeting if possible, especially from the bedroom.
- If carpet cannot be removed, vacuum all carpeted areas at least weekly with HEPA-certified vacuum cleaner.
- Avoid using a humidifier (dehumidifiers are unlikely to be of benefit)

PETS

Warm blooded pets (dogs, cats, hamsters) have hair and shed dander that become part of the house dust, or circulate as small particles in the air. Animal dander can also settle on the bedding and on upholstered furniture. Salivary proteins released in the air and urinary proteins left on the floor can also trigger symptoms. There are no "allergy free" breeds of cats or dogs, so beware of this label.

THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAY TO AVOID ALLERGY SYMPTOMS IS TO ELIMINATE THE OFFENSIVE PET ALTOGETHER.

Methods to decrease pet dander exposure:

- Keep the pet outdoors
- Keep the pet out of carpeted areas and bedrooms
- Wash your hands thoroughly after touching the pet
- Vacuum the pet's living quarters daily or every other day using HEPA filter vacuum bag
- Change the home's air filters monthly

COCKROACH

Many allergy patients test positive for cockroach, because everyone is exposed to small amounts of cockroach proteins when they enter the home from the outside. Cockroach infestations can trigger symptoms because the level of protein is much greater. In those cases, I recommend gel bait products such as Combat Roach Bait® or boric acid (keep out of reach of children). Hiring an exterminator may help, but some sprays worsen asthma symptoms.