



Breathing Bugs?

At this time of year, it isn't uncommon for a busy executive to suffer from mild sneezes, coughs, itchy eyes, and a runny nose. But don't be too fast to blame these allergy symptoms on spring pollen or a cold – you may actually be suffering an allergic reaction to dust mites, which can even be exacerbated by spring cleaning chores such as vacuuming, sweeping, and dusting.

For some people, dust mite allergies may be the primary cause of inflammation and contraction of your airways, resulting in wheezing, shortness of breath and other breathing difficulties. Dust mites, also known as bed mites, are actually tiny insects of the arachnid class - cousins of spiders, scorpions, and ticks. They are exceptionally small, measuring just about 0.3 millimeters long, which is so tiny that you probably won't see any with the naked eye. Yet these tiny eight legged creatures leave lots of little fecal pellets, about 20 pellets a day, after feasting on our skin particles. Also known as frass, their fecal matter contains proteins and is what many people are sensitive to and can cause considerable health problems generally appearing in the form of allergies and asthma. This happens because allergens can cause a response in the immune system which results in the production of a special antibody (Immunoglobulin E or IgE).

IgE brings about an allergic inflammatory response. Because our skin flakes and the dander and skin particles of our pets provide excellent sustenance for the mites, mites settle in places where we spend lots of time - our favorite upholstered sofas and chairs, carpeting, mattresses, bed sheets, blankets and pillows. That means that every night we are immersed in bed mite domicile - inhaling dust mite allergen with every breath. The good news is that dust mites don't bite, don't spread diseases and usually do not live on people. They are harmful only to people who become allergic to them.

This all sounds quite disgusting, but dust mites aren't a sign of a dirty house. While a dusty house can make allergy problems worse, regular housekeeping generally won't remove these bothersome critters. That's due to dust mite allergens weight – it's relatively heavy when compared to things like lint and fungus spores which float around easily in household air. This means vigorous cleaning can actually put more frass into the air making symptoms worse.



So how can you rid your home of these pesky mini allergens? Minimize moisture in your home by keeping your indoor humidity below 55 percent. Remove wall-to-wall carpets from the bedroom if feasible, and while vacuuming, use a HEPA filter that you change regularly. After washing bed linens in hot water and a thorough cleaning, you can encase your mattress and pillows with mite proof covers to help minimize nightly mite exposure.

If you are suffering from coughs, sneezes, tightness in your chest or wheezing, see your doctor at Executive MD to discuss the types of allergens you may be exposed to and how you can minimize these symptoms.

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