

ABOUT COMMON ALLERGENS

Airborne Allergens

Hay fever symptoms are often triggered by airborne particles that are inhaled, such as pollen, outdoor and indoor mold, and animal dander. Symptoms include sneezing, post-nasal drip, sinus congestion, sore throat, headache, fatigue, and itchy, watery eyes. Left untreated, hay fever symptoms can lead to medical complications, such as sinus and ear infections. Utilizing the "**allergen avoidance**" methods can enhance the effects of medical treatment and improve the sense of well-being.

House Dust

Dust mites are the largest offender in house dust worldwide and are the single, most important allergen associated with asthma. Thriving in humid, dark and warm environments, they make their homes primarily in pillows, mattresses, carpets and upholstered furniture, burrowing themselves deep into the fabric. Our homes are inundated with these microscopic, insect-like creatures and their debris, creating a hazardous environment for the allergy sufferer. It is virtually impossible to completely eliminate dust mites from your home, just as it is impossible to "cure" allergies.

The key is **allergen avoidance**, which can significantly reduce symptoms, decrease medication requirements, and dramatically improve the quality of life. By encasing mattresses, pillows and box springs in zippered covers with a dust mite barrier, the mites are removed from their food source and ultimately die. There are also products available which can kill the dust mite in carpets or deactivate mite protein in the carpeting as well as the furniture.

Asthma and Respiratory Problems

Asthmatics have hyperactive airway disease. An allergen-free and irritant-free environment can help reduce symptoms and exacerbations. There are products that are especially helpful for asthma patients, such as spacers for inhaled medications. The effectiveness of metered dose inhalers can be increased with the use of spacers. Some patients find inadequate relief from metered dose inhalers and may benefit by using the same medication with a nebulizer. Nebulizers are especially useful in infants and young children.

The peak flow meter is a valuable aid in asthma management that can help detect and prevent asthma exacerbations that might result in emergency department visits and hospitalization.

Mold

Mold flourishes in dark, damp and poorly ventilated places. It is found both indoors and outdoors, and is a common allergy trigger. Indoors, mold is generally found in basements, closets, kitchens, bathrooms and crawl spaces. Plumbing leaks and other areas where water accumulates are trigger areas for mold growth, as are houseplants. Outdoors, mold spores are widely disbursed in the air and far outnumber pollen grains. They too, can enter the home. Here are some tips to minimize mold allergens:

- Keep home **well ventilated**
- Use **air conditioning** whenever possible
- Use **dehumidifiers** in damp areas
- Avoid the use of vaporizers/humidifiers, which can accumulate mold
- Properly maintain heating and cooling systems
- Replace fiberglass filters with **dust and allergy electrostatic filters**
- Use **mold/mildew removers** and inhibitors
- Install **window ventilators** to filter outdoor allergens and irritants
- Use a **HEPA room air cleaner** for airborne allergens

Animal Dander

Allergy and asthma patients should not keep furry pets in the home. Not only is their dander allergenic, but the pets' fur collects pollen, dust, mold and irritants. Ideally, the pet should be restricted to the outdoors or to one room of the home. If the pet remains in the home, use of a HEPA (High Efficiency Particulate Air) room air cleaner and ULPA or HEPA vacuum cleaner can remove up to 99.97% of most common airborne animal allergens.