

Common Sense in **ALLERGY & ASTHMA**



Avoiding Winter Allergens in Your Home

Winter weather has forced us inside, increasing exposure to common indoor allergens such as molds, dust mites, and pets. Symptoms of respiratory allergy can mimic those of viral respiratory infection. Suspect allergy if symptoms last longer than expected for a cold or recur in a seasonal pattern.

Simple environmental control measures are often helpful:

MOLDS have three requirements for growth: moisture, a substrate (usually cellulose) and oxygen. Repair leaks. Remove all mold-damaged material that doesn't have an easily cleaned hard surface. Scrub with a 1:10 dilution of household bleach with hand dishwasher detergent to both kill and remove mold from most contaminated hard surfaces.

DUST MITES—The bed is almost always the most important source of dust mite exposure in the home. Modern dust-proof mattress and

pillow covers are made of tightly woven fabrics that breathe, unlike older plastic covers. Wash bedding at least once a month with a technique that kills and removes dust mites. Hard floors trap fewer dust mites than carpet but it's often not worth the cost of replacing it except on concrete slab floors. Put knick-knacks, collectibles, stuffed animals, and other "dust collectors" in cabinets with glass or plastic doors.

PETS—Sometimes pet exposures can desensitize as well as sensitize but for already sensitized individuals complete avoidance offers the best control. When this isn't practical, allergy shots almost always help.

AIR FILTERS AND CLEANERS may reduce dust and make air seem fresher but they generally don't reduce exposure to dust mite allergen. Vacuum cleaners with HEPA filters or double layer dust bags (one bag inside another) will reduce exposure.

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