



KEEPING THE HOUSE DUST MITE AT BAY ADVICE FOR PEOPLE WITH ATOPIC ECZEMA

WHAT ARE HOUSE DUST MITES?

House dust mites are tiny relatives of spiders and ticks which love to live in warm, damp places and are present in all our homes. It's not the mites themselves that cause problems but their droppings, which can cause problems for people who are atopic.

WHERE IN THE HOME CAN HOUSE DUST MITES BE FOUND?

House dust mites are found in the largest numbers in mattresses and bedding where there is a good supply of their main food source – flakes of human skin which we all shed when we are in bed. House dust mites can also make their home in carpets, curtains and soft furnishings.

WHAT EFFECT DO HOUSE DUST MITES HAVE ON ECZEMA?

House dust mites are unlikely to be the main cause of eczema but the eczema can sometimes be made worse by dust mite allergies.

CAN I GET RID OF HOUSE DUST MITES?

It is impossible to get rid of the mites completely from the whole house, but you can reduce their numbers by doing some simple things. Cutting down on dust in the home may be important in some cases, as dust mite droppings are found in dust, so damp dust and vacuum around the house at least once a week. Adults with eczema sometimes find that vacuuming causes skin irritation, in which case it would be better for someone else to do the vacuuming if possible.

The following steps may also help reduce the number of house dust mites in the house.

- Air the bedroom and living room daily to reduce humidity, making them a less attractive place for the mites to live. The mites prefer warm, damp conditions.
- Some authorities recommend that curtains should be replaced with blinds (preferably roller blinds) or that curtains that can be washed regularly should be bought. However, there is no guarantee that this will improve atopic eczema.
- If you are thinking about replacing your vacuum cleaner, it may be worthwhile buying one, which has a high-powered filter.

- If possible, fit mattress, pillows and duvets with barrier covers, although these can be expensive. Vacuum mattresses and wash bedding at a temperature of at least 60°C once a week. Man-made pillows and duvets are easier to wash than those containing feathers and are less likely to provide a home for the house dust mites.
- It may help to remove unnecessary ornaments or items such as books or to keep them in enclosed display cupboards rather than on open shelves.
- Soft toys also provide a home for house dust mites. Although children do not like to be parted from favourite toys, the toys should be washed regularly according to instructions on the toys' label. The house dust mite can be destroyed by putting soft toys in the freezer overnight and then washing them to remove the droppings. Keep toys in a toy box or cupboard where they will not get covered in dust.

For people who have severe eczema, and it is thought by a doctor or preferably a dermatologist that house dust mite allergy may be playing a part in make the eczema worse, the additional measures below may be worth thinking about.

- Consider replacing carpets with tiles or wooden flooring. If you want to, use rugs and wash them regularly at a temperature of at least 60°C.
- If possible, buy sofas and chairs covered in leather or vinyl or fit washable covers. If this is not possible, vacuum soft furnishings once a week.

But before incurring significant expense, it is best to obtain the advice of a dermatologist. Stringent measures to reduce house dust mite exposure are not always effective, and there are likely to be several other approaches to the treatment of atopic eczema that are worthwhile before the difficult process of house dust mite avoidance is contemplated.

CAN I USE ANTI-HOUSE DUST MITE SPRAYS?

Anti-house dust mite sprays should be used with caution as they may cause skin irritation and are expensive. Furthermore, after use the room needs to be vacuumed to remove house dust droppings. The success of this approach is also far from being proven.

Disclaimer

This information is provided only as a general guide. Individual circumstances differ and the National Eczema Society does not prescribe, give medical advice or endorse products or treatments. We hope you will find the information useful but it does not replace, and should not replace, the essential guidance, which can be given your doctor or nurse.

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