

Minimising Exposure to Allergens

An allergen is a substance which causes an allergic reaction. Most allergens that cause nasal inflammation and/or asthma are air-borne. Common ones include dust mite, pollens, cockroach debris, or mould spores. Several of the measures below will help for many of these different sources – for example, dampness will encourage both mould and dust mites to grow. Minimising dampness will therefore address both.

Avoiding the allergens that cause your symptoms will not stop you being allergic to them.

However, there are many benefits to avoiding them:

- Avoidance is safe and without side effects.
- It decreases the amount of medications required. This can lead to significant financial savings.
- It improves the effectiveness of your medication.
- It is safe in pregnancy.
- It may reduce the risk of development of allergic disease in young children.

Minimising Indoor Allergens (e.g. dust mite, mould)

Ideal Measures:

- Remove carpet and replace with hard surfaces.
- Replace wallpaper with paint.
- Remove drapes and replace with roll-up blinds.
- Ensure heating, ventilation or air-conditioning systems are properly maintained.
- Sweep and dust regularly with a moist cloth to prevent dust rising.
- Use 5% ammonia solution to remove mould from bathrooms and other contaminated surfaces.
- Use dehumidifiers in the home if relative humidity is constantly high (above 50%).
- Encase mattress and pillow in material impervious to dust mites (see below).
- Wash bedding regularly in hot water (>55°C) or soak in eucalyptus oil and detergent (unless skin rashes are worsened by this). Dry them in direct sun (>3 hours if possible) or in clothes dryer on high heat.
- Get rid of soft toys.
- Keep bedrooms uncluttered.
- Get rid of pets (if there is a confirmed pet allergy). If this is not possible, keep them outside, or at least out of the bedroom. Change clothes before going to school/work if you have attended to your pet.
- Store clothes for changes of seasons in plastic bags after cleaning.
- Install car dust/pollen filters if possible.

Less Effective Measures:

- Dry-clean carpets, then vacuum regularly with machine with HEPA exhaust filter.
- Use acaracides regularly (at least every six months) on carpets and soft furnishings.
- Freeze fabric dolls and teddy bears overnight to kill house dust mite, then wash in hot water to remove allergen.
- Do not use evaporative cooling: it increases humidity and encourages growth of dust mite and mould.
- Use an air-conditioner to remove humidity.
- Attend to leaks and damp in the home, repair water leaks immediately.
- Rely on electricity for heating and cooking and avoid un-flued gas heaters.
- Remove indoor pot plants.

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Commercial Anti-Dust Mite Products:

- Allergend Formac Products: www.allergend.com.au
- Allerlux: www.allerlux.com.au
- Allerseach/DAC Asthma and Allergy Aids: www.allergyhelp.com
- Miteguard: Auspharm Pty Ltd www.auspharm.com.au

Minimising Outdoor Allergens (e.g. pollens)

- Keep windows closed at peak pollen times, e.g. in the evening when airborne pollens descend to lower altitudes.
- If you live in a city, avoid visiting high pollen areas in spring.
- Drive with car windows closed and air conditioner on recycle. Some models of cars have pollen filters incorporated in their air conditioning system.
- Keep windows of home closed and use air conditioning.
- Avoid cutting grass in late summer when mould spores are present in decaying vegetation, and keep windows closed when grass is being mown.
- Avoid mowing of lawn yourself, and wear a mask if working out of doors.
- Try to do essential garden work after rain, which has removed pollen from the atmosphere.
- Avoid outdoors on windy days.
- Wear glasses or sunglasses to reduce the chances of pollen impacting on the conjunctivae.
- Shower and wash hair to remove pollen before going to bed.
- Use a clothes dryer or hang clothes indoors instead of line drying.
- Choose garden plants that are low pollinators. Even though pollens travel great distances, some may cause problems if in high concentrations in a local area such as a garden.
- Refer to pollen counts or pollen calendars when available (www.allergy.org.au/patients/allergic-rhinitis-hay-fever-and-sinusitis/guide-to-common-allergenic-pollen). These may be of limited value in the day-to-day management of allergic disease since they are usually retrospective. High pollen counts can be predicted from weather and climate patterns (www.weatherzone.com.au/pollen-index), but are often inaccurate.

Further Information:

- Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy (ASCI): www.allergy.org.au
- World Health Organisation Allergy Guidelines: www.worldallergy.org