

Get Indoor Allergies Out

Winter weather is here and this means more time is spent indoors to keep warm. This increases exposure to indoor allergens such as dust, mold, pet dander and cockroaches. More than 40 million people in the United States suffer from indoor allergies year round. Indoor allergies can lead to other chronic conditions such as asthma or perennial allergic rhinitis, therefore they should not be taken lightly. If you notice an increase in sneezing, itching, coughing, stuffy nose, red eyes or other allergy symptoms, it is important to take the following steps to reduce allergens in your home and see an allergist/immunologist for proper diagnosis.

Dust

- Put mattresses, box springs and pillows in special plastic cases that are allergy-proof or “non-allergenic.” Studies have shown these to be effective, and they are available in many nationwide stores.
- Get rid of extra clutter in your home. Clutter is anything that will collect dust, such as piles of stuffed animals, stacks of books, knick-knacks and collectibles. Allow your children to keep a few items in their bedrooms, but pack the rest in a hall closet so they aren’t collecting dust.
- Dust also settles in carpeting. Hardwood, tile or linoleum is better for people with allergies. Washable throw rugs may also be used if they are regularly washed in hot water or dry cleaned.
- Wash blankets, sheets and pillow cases in 130 degree water and dry in a hot drier once a week.

Molds

- Clean moldy surfaces, such as the corners of showers or under the sink. Use a cleaning solution containing 5% bleach and a small amount of detergent.
- Avoid carpeting in bathrooms or basements, and remove any moldy carpeting. Use a dehumidifier and keep the humidity level in the home below 50%.
- Don’t try to “air out” indoor allergens from the home. Opening the windows can bring outdoor allergens, such as pollen and mold spores, into the house. Instead, use air conditioning to clean, re-circulate and dehumidify the air in your home. Consider using in-home air filters, many of which can be used in conjunction with existing forced air cooling and heating systems.

Pets

- To limit exposure to animal dander, keep your pet out of the bedroom and other rooms where people with allergies spend a great deal of time.
- Wash your hands after touching pets.

Cockroaches

- Vacuum or sweep the floor after meals, and take the garbage and recyclables out frequently. People with allergies should use a vacuum with a HEPA (high-efficiency particulate) filter or a double bag, since using a standard or water-filtered vacuum cleaner stirs dust up into the air. Allergic individuals should also wear dust masks.
- Keep food in containers with tight lids and wash dishes in hot, soapy water immediately after use.

- Clean under stoves, refrigerators or toasters where loose crumbs can accumulate. Wipe off the stove top, and clean other kitchen surfaces and cupboards regularly.
- Fix leaks that may leave surfaces wet and allow mold to grow, or attract cockroaches.
- Block areas where roaches could enter the home, including crevices, wall cracks, windows, woodwork or floor gaps, basement, and outside door drains.

Contact an allergist/immunologist for more on treatment options and tips on reducing your allergen exposure.

-Brought to you by the American Academy of Allergy Asthma & Immunology