

Air Purifiers Help with Dust Mite Allergies

A particularly insidious household allergen that can cause a great deal of trouble at any age is the dust mite. Often people believe themselves to be allergic to dust, when in reality what they are truly allergic to are the mites that live in and on the dust.

What Are Dust Mites?

Dust mites are microscopic sized, ugly arachnids – yes, they are relatives to the spider. Most household dust is comprised of human skin cells that are constantly shed. Dust mites feed on dead human skin cells. They thrive in warm, humid environments and can be found pretty much everywhere in the home, especially in carpeting, bedding, pillows, and upholstery. The allergic reaction is either to the dust mite feces or to proteins on or in the body of the mites. Anywhere from 100 – 19,000 dust mites can live in one gram of dust (the weight of a paper clip). They do not live on people or animals like their cousin, the tick, does. They do not spread disease or bite. But, for those who are allergic, this bug is very harmful.

Allergies from dust mites can cause runny noses, itchy eyes, sneezing, cough, nasal congestion, asthma, wheezing, difficulty sleeping, postnasal drip, and mild rashes. When these symptoms become an impediment to living a normal life, it is time to do something about dust mites.

The population of dust mites increases in the spring and fall. During these seasons, the indoor humidity level usually rises. Ideal relative humidity levels for dust mites are 60-90%. In addition, they begin to multiply when the temperature reaches 50-90 F. During the winter months, humidity levels within the house tend to be low and the mite population drops as well.

How Do You Rid Your House of Dust Mites?

You can never completely get rid of dust mites. Acceptance that they are a natural part of our small indoor microcosm is key to not driving yourself crazy trying to rid your home of the bug. However, you can reduce the number of mites significantly by decreasing indoor humidity, Clean and replace heating and air conditioning filters regularly. Put an air purifier in the bedroom. Vacuuming stirs up dust and makes things worse, so shampoo or wet wash carpeting in the house as much as possible. Cover bedding with allergen-proof covers (because mites will always live in bedding, no matter how clean you are!). If you have carpeting in other rooms of the house, try to place air purifiers in those rooms.

The best air purifiers to help control dust mite contamination is a purifier with a good, high grade HEPA filter. HEPA filters are made of special fine screen materials that can capture very small particles. A HEPA filter air purifier should also have a good prefilter that captures large particles. A prefilter will increase the life and efficiency of the much more expensive HEPA filter. Adsorption filters with activated carbon that adsorbs gases and volatile chemicals will not be effective for any particulate matter, including dust and mites.

It is very important when you purchase an air purifier that you know the size of the room it will purify and make sure the purifier will be able to purify the air in that room. If you don't mind paying a little extra, a germicidal UV lamp will also kill bacteria and mold that may also be exacerbating your allergy symptoms. Keeping dust to a minimum using these air purifiers will help eliminate the food source (human skin flakes) for mites. Without any food to eat, dust mites will eventually die off from starvation.