



PARTNERSHIP FOR
PUBLIC HEALTH

Allergic Asthma or Chronic Runny Nose or Hay Fever?

By Alan S. Peterson, MD

Take a few steps to reduce allergens in your home. Many steps to reduce indoor allergens are complicated and time-consuming --- but there are some easy things you can do that may help. Some steps may be more effective than others, depending on what particular allergy or allergies you have.

- **Bed and bedding.** Very important! Encase pillows, mattresses and box springs in dust-mite-proof covers with a pore size no greater than 6 micrometers. Wash sheets, pillowcases and blankets at least once a week in water heated to at least 130° F (54° C). Remove, wash or cover comforters. Replace wool or feathered bedding with synthetic materials. Replace foam, feather and kapok pillows with synthetic pillows.
- **Flooring.** Remove carpeting and use hardwood, tile, vinyl, concrete or linoleum flooring or washable area rugs. If that isn't an option, use low-pile instead of high-pile carpeting and vacuum weekly with a vacuum cleaner that has a small-particle or high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter. Shampoo the carpet frequently or use washable carpets. Remove moldy or water damaged carpeting. Wash area rugs and floor mats weekly.
- **Windows.** Close windows and rely on air conditioning during pollen season. Clean mold and condensation from window frame and sills. Use double-paned windows. Check for and repair any leaks or water damage.
- **Furnishings.** Choose easy-to-clean chairs, dressers and nightstands made of leather, wood, metal or plastic. Avoid upholstered furniture.
- **Clutter.** Remove items that collect dust, such as knickknacks, tabletop ornaments, collectables, books, clothes and magazines. Store children's toys, games and stuffed animals in plastic bins.
- **Pets.** If you are proven to be allergic to them, and can't find new a home for your dog or cat, at least keep animals out of the bedroom. Bathing pets at least once a week may reduce the amount of allergen in the dander they shed. In the future, perhaps, if purchasing animals look for those with minimal shed.

- **Air filtration.** Choose an air filter that has a small-particle or HEPA filter. Try adjusting your air filter so that it directs clean air toward your head when you sleep.
- **Curtains and blinds.** Use washable curtains made of plain cotton or synthetic fabric. Replace horizontal blinds with washable roller-type shades.
- **Plants.** Find a new home for potted plants or spread aquarium gravel over the dirt to help contain mold.
- **Fireplaces.** Avoid use of wood-burning fireplaces or stoves because smoke and gases can worsen respiratory allergies. Most natural gas fireplaces won't cause this problem, but some can.
- **Stove.** Install and use a vented exhaust fan to remove cooking fumes and reduce moisture. (Most stove-top hoods simply filter cooking particulates without venting outside.)
- **Refrigerator.** Wipe up excessive moisture to avoid mold growth. Discard moldy or out-of-date food. Regularly empty and clean the dripping pan and clean or replace moldy rubber seals around doors.
- **Cabinets and counters.** Clean cabinets and countertops with detergent and water. Check under-sink cabinets for plumbing leaks. Store food --- including pet food --- in sealed containers.
- **Food waste.** Place garbage in a can with an insect-proof lid and empty trash daily. Keeping the kitchen free of food crumbs will help reduce the chance you will have rodents or cockroaches, which increase allergens.
- **Ventilation.** Install and use an exhaust fan to reduce moisture while taking baths or showers
- **Walls.** Remove wallpaper and install tile, or paint walls with mold-resistant enamel paint. If roof or wall leakage, check behind dry wall for mold or rot, and remove.
- **Shower and tub.** Towel-dry the tub and enclosure after use. Scrub mold from tub, shower and faucets with bleach. (Bleach can make noses run. If so, get someone else to do it.) Clean or replace moldy shower curtains and bathmats.
- **Toilet and sink.** Scrub mold from plumbing fixtures. Repair leaks. Wash dishes daily.
- **Foundation and stairwells.** Check for and repair any sources of leaks or water damage.
- **Clothes dryer.** Vent moisture outside. Clean the filter and tubing often.
- **Temperature and humidity.** Hot, humid houses are breeding grounds for dust mites and mold. Maintain temperature between 68° F (20° C) and 72° F (22° C) and keep relative humidity no higher than 50 percent. Use a dehumidifier to decrease dampness and clean it once a week. Clean or replace small-particle filters in central heating and cooling systems and in room air conditioners at least once a month.

- **Pests.** Control cockroaches and mice with inexpensive traps from the hardware store. If that's not effective, hire a professional exterminator. To remove allergy-triggering insect and mouse residue, thoroughly vacuum carpeting and wash hard surfaces. To prevent re-infestation, seal cracks or other possible entryways.
- **Mold.** Close doors and windows during warm weather and use air conditioning and dehumidifiers. Remove nonwashable contaminated materials such as carpeting. Clean washable material with a solution of 5 percent chlorine bleach and wear a protective mask when cleaning away mold.
- **Weekly cleaning routine.** Damp-mop wood or linoleum flooring and vacuum carpeting. Use a vacuum cleaner with a small-particle or a high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter. Use a damp cloth to clean other surfaces, including the tops of doors, windowsills and window frames. If you have allergies, either wear a dust mask or get someone who doesn't have allergies to do this job.
- **Smoking.** Don't allow smoking anywhere inside your house.

References:

1. Allergens and irritants. National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences.
<http://www.hiehs.nih.gov/health/topics/conditions/asthma/allergens/index.cfm>. Accessed Oct. 1, 2013.
2. Managing indoor allergen culprits. American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology.
<http://www.aaaai.org>. Accessed Oct. 1, 2013.