



Allergy-Proofing the Home



Do you often suffer from the sniffles and a sore throat? Your home might be to blame.

According to the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology, between 40 and 50 million people in the United States suffer from allergies, and a large percentage of them suffer from the effects of indoor allergens.

Controlling your indoor environment is your best defense against allergies. Here are the most common and where they are found:

Dust Mites

These bedroom dwellers feed on the shed skin of humans and their pets, which means they can be found throughout your house. Because most of us spend much of our time at home in the bedroom, they are especially populous there. The most problematic items are your mattress and pillow, but you can protect yourself by sealing these items in anti-allergen coverings and washing your bedding and curtains frequently.

Mold

Any area of your home with high humidity or where water accumulates is prone to mold – kitchens, bathrooms and basements are the best examples of such rooms. Mold thrives around cracks where water seeps in; around leaks in hoses, dishwashers and toilets; and under carpets that are frequently exposed to moisture. Paying attention to these areas and fixing leaks as they occur is your best prevention against this type of allergen. Preventing mold also protects your home's value!

Cockroaches

Despite their nasty persona, it's not cockroaches that people are allergic to, it's their droppings. Unfortunately, the protein in their dung is a primary trigger of allergic reactions and asthma symptoms. Attracted to humid, dark locales and exposed food sources, cockroaches are big fans of the kitchen, but they also swarm to basements with leaky pipes, as well as open garbage bins. Preventive measures include keeping food tightly sealed and garbage containers closed (or kept outside of your home), fixing leaky pipes when they occur, and vacuuming and/or sweeping floors frequently to make sure food crumbs are swept away. Another simple, over-the-counter remedy is to place roach motels in strategic locations throughout your home. However, if your roach problem is exceptionally bad, consider hiring an exterminator.

Pets

Proteins from dander – the skin flakes that your dog or cat sheds – cause allergic reactions in many people. These proteins can be found in household dust and lodged in carpets and upholstery. If you are allergic to dander, consider that while there are no allergen-free breeds, the amount of dander produced varies by breed, so some breeds may be more agreeable to allergy sufferers than others. Try to spend time with someone else's dog or cat to determine if you're allergic before getting a pet of your own. In addition, some studies have shown that bathing your cat or dog on a weekly basis can help to reduce the amount of dander shed in your home.

BEDROOMS

- Pillows
- Bedding
- Curtains

BATHROOMS

- Shower
- Towels
- Sink

KITCHENS

- Faucets
- Dishwashers
- Garbage Bins

LIVING ROOM

- Fans
- Fireplace
- Upholstery

If you suffer from constant allergies, one of the best ways to fight them is by cleaning. Spring cleaning alone won't be enough to stave off dust-mites and cockroaches; in order to reduce exposure you need ongoing home maintenance.

Tip: Wear a mask while you're cleaning so that you don't inhale allergens.

Cleaning, Room by Room.

Bedrooms

- ▶ Wash sheets weekly in very hot water (130°F).
- ▶ Wash other bedding regularly in very hot water (130°F) and dry in a hot air dryer at least every eight weeks.
- ▶ Vacuum your box spring and mattress; encase each in an anti-allergen covering and wipe off with a clean, damp cloth.
- ▶ Dust and vacuum all surfaces weekly.
- ▶ Keep pets out of your bedroom.

Kitchens

- ▶ Clean the inside and outside of your refrigerator monthly.
- ▶ Clean crumbs, grease and water from stove, flooring and countertops regularly.
- ▶ Empty trash cans daily, and clean them on a regular basis.
- ▶ Clean the area under your sink, keeping it dry and reducing clutter. Dispose of any paper grocery bags, as they are a favorite hiding place for roaches.
- ▶ Keep food containers tightly sealed.
- ▶ Wash and dry dishes as soon as possible after eating.

Living/Dining

- ▶ Vacuum once per week – more often if you have a pet – and if possible, use a vacuum with a HEPA filter in order to keep fewer allergens from circulating into the air.
- ▶ Clean light fixtures and fans monthly, using a clean, damp cloth.
- ▶ Vacuum upholstered furniture regularly; steam clean furniture and carpets at least once a year.
- ▶ Keep your fireplace clean and maintained; don't store mold-prone firewood indoors.

Basements

- ▶ Remove carpet from slab concrete floors to prevent mold growth.
- ▶ Periodically check pipes; fix any leaks.

Ventilation

- ▶ Clean ductwork regularly to prevent allergens from building up in your central heating and air systems.
- ▶ Change and clean cooling and heating system filters monthly.

Bathrooms

- ▶ Clean showers and bathtubs weekly, making sure to clear out soap scum in the process.
- ▶ Wipe up water around showers and bathtubs after every shower, and keep the shower door or curtain open during the day so that the walls will dry.
- ▶ Use an exhaust fan and/or keep windows open during showers to lower humidity in the room.
- ▶ Wash towels and bath mats often.
- ▶ Clean the area under the sink. Repair any leaks.

All Rooms

- ▶ Consider solid surface flooring (linoleum, hardwood or laminate) instead of carpet.
- ▶ Regularly wipe dust from walls, ceilings and furniture with a damp cloth.
- ▶ Allow natural sunshine into your home to reduce mold growth.
- ▶ Seal any cracks around the walls, floors or cabinets where roaches can sneak in.
- ▶ Use shades or washable curtains for window coverings; wipe shades with a clean, damp cloth and wash curtains regularly.
- ▶ Clear out clutter; get rid of dried flower arrangements.