

Avoidance – Pollen, Pets, Mold, Dust

Pollen: Trees, Weeds and Grasses

Pollen grains are produced by a great number of plants in the United States but only a relatively small percentage produce pollen that cause allergies. Most pollen grains are microscopic and can easily be inhaled and drawn into the respiratory system where they are dissolved by secretions and the allergenic substances are released in your body. The best way to avoid inhaling pollens is by remaining indoors where the air can be filtered during high pollen count periods. If you must be outdoors during peak pollinating seasons, you might consider wearing a face mask to reduce the amount of pollen you inhale.

As a rule, trees pollinate in the early spring, grasses pollinate in the summer through early fall. Obviously, there are some allergenic plants, such as Mountain Cedar trees, that are exceptions to these pollinating periods, and the exact date of pollination for any given plant may vary greatly depending on the region of the country and climatic conditions from year to year. Plants tend to release more pollen on warm, dry, windy days.

Pets

People who are allergic to their pets cannot expect to achieve complete relief from their allergy symptoms through medications, or immunotherapy (allergy shots) unless the pet is removed from the house. Remember, the best treatment for your allergy is to avoid the substance that produces your symptoms. In the case of allergies to pets, this is something you can control.

Cats appear to be the most allergenic of the pets. A potent allergy-producing substance is found in cat saliva and in the glands at the base of the hair. Since cats groom themselves by licking, this allergy-producing substance becomes distributed over the cat's coat, the hair is shed and decomposes, and eventually this substance is inhaled by those people living in the same house with the cat.

Dogs appear to be less allergenic than cats but can still cause significant allergy symptoms. Some experts believe male dogs to be more allergenic than females and there are indications that some breeds may be less allergenic than others but you can become allergic to any breed of dog kept in the house.

Birds, gerbils, hamsters, and guinea pigs all have a definite ability to cause allergies. If you or a member of your family are allergic, you should not keep a pet in your house. Even though the pet may not be the current cause of the allergy, people who have the tendency to develop allergies will probably become allergic to the pet sooner or later.

Molds

Molds are tiny plant-like organisms that become visible as “colonies” growing on various substances. Molds give off spores at various times which are very similar to pollen grains (in size and weight) and are easily inhaled, causing allergy symptoms in allergic people. Once inhaled, mold spores are broken down and the allergy-causing substances are released into your system. If you are allergic to one mold, you have an 85% chance of being allergic to others. When you see the mold count presented on TV or in the newspaper, this count actually reflects the number of mold spores per unit of air in your local atmosphere.

Indoors

- Remove mildewed carpets
- Remove house plants
- Paint mildewed areas with mold-inhibiting paint
- Install power vents in bathrooms to remove moisture

- Dry bathroom walls after showers
- Clean tile, grout, and shower curtains with cleaning agents containing chlorine or other substances effective in killing mold
- Repair any plumbing leaks, especially under cabinets
- Insulate water pipes that tend to “sweat” and collect condensation
- Dehumidify and heat basements
- Clean air conditions, humidifiers, and dehumidifiers regularly
- Leave a light on in damp closets
- Vent a clothes dryer to the outside
- Avoid areas of the house or workplace that may be constantly damp and poorly ventilated

Outdoors

- Keep lawn grass cut short
- Avoid lawn and gardening chores or wear a mask if you must perform these jobs
- Avoid heavily shaded areas where decomposing leaves and branches are present

House Dust

House Dust is a complex mixture that may contain decomposed cellulose, mold spores, pet hair particles, insect particles, House Dust Mites, and other things that might be unique to your home. The composition of House Dust can vary greatly from house to house, but the ingredient in House Dust that is most consistent and important in producing allergy is the House Dust Mite.

House Dust Mites are invisible to the naked eye and are a normal part of almost every household. Mites thrive in warm, humid environments where relative humidity is in excess of 70% and the temperature is 68 to 84° ° F. Their favorite diet is human skin flakes that we shed daily so they are found most commonly in bedding, upholstered chairs, carpets, and even stuffed toys. Mites live two to four months and live populations will peak and subside several times during the year. Dead mite bodies and mite wastes products decompose to form a very fine dust that is inhaled and can produce allergy symptoms in allergic individuals.

Some steps can be taken to reduce exposure to House Dust and House Dust Mites:

- Enclose mattresses, box springs and pillows in dust proof coverings
- Change bed linens weekly and wash in hot water to kill mites
- Vacuum frequently. Don't forget window sills, the tops of drapes and other nooks and crannies where dust can collect
- Minimize dust-collecting fabrics by removing carpet, upholstered furniture, and drapes
- Use air filtration devices to purify the air
- Ensure your heating and air conditioning filters are installed correctly to clean the air in your house

Pharmacotherapy

Medications can frequently control allergy symptoms. These may include antihistamines, decongestants, prescription nasal sprays and other types of products. Dr. Gupta can give you much more detailed information regarding the pros and cons of the different types of medications. He will also tailor a medication regimen based on your particular set of symptoms.