

# TEXAS REGIONAL ASTHMA AND ALLERGY CENTER, L.L.P.

*Board Certified specialists in allergy, asthma, immunology, and respiratory disorders*

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## HOW TO CONTROL DUST MITES

Dust is a mixture of a variety of substances. Although dust is certainly an irritant, it is also a potent source of allergens. **The principal allergenic substance in dust is from the dust mite.** Dust mites are microscopic bugs that live in dust, feeding on sloughed skin from our bodies, which is one of the constituents of dust. The allergens of the dust mite are in digestive enzymes found in the excrement and body parts of mites. Dust mites flourish in warm, humid environments. Consequently, the highest numbers of dust mites are found in carpets, pillows, and mattresses.

Controlling the dust mite requires more than just routine housecleaning. In fact, although weekly vacuuming is helpful (wear a mask), vacuuming more frequently does little to reduce the mite allergen levels. In addition, although special air cleaners are very effective at filtering mite allergen particles, these particles do not remain airborne for a long enough time for these air cleaners to be able to effectively reduce mite allergen levels. Since most of us spend a significant amount of time sleeping, dust mite control measures are usually targeted at the bedroom. The following are a list of several measures, which have been shown to be effective in reducing mite allergen levels.

1. **Wash all bed linens at least every week using the hot cycle (at least 130 F).** This temperature is required to kill the dust mites.
2. **Remove all feather pillows, down comforters, and stuffed animals from bed.** These act as reservoirs for dust mites.
3. **Encase the pillows, mattress, and box spring in plastic encasements to trap the mites and allergens inside.** There are several manufacturers of these products; none have been proven superior.
4. If your bedroom has tile or hardwood floor it is best to remove any throw rugs from the bedroom. Since carpet removal is often an unwanted expense, this is typically reserved if the above control measures are unsuccessful. However, if you already planning on removing your carpet or moving to a new home, hardwood or tile floors are much better for the mite allergic individual.
5. Acaracides (chemicals which kill mites) are available for use in the home. These acaracides are fairly expensive and require repeated applications to remain effective. It is still unclear how much (if any) clinical benefit is gained by the use of acaracides. Therefore these agents are usually not recommended for initial mite control.
6. **Keep ceiling fans off in the bedroom.** They can stir up dust which may cause higher amounts of dust mite allergen to become airborne.<

It is important to realize that with all of the above measures, **it will take several weeks or even months for you to recognize any benefit from all your hard work.** However with patience and diligence, adequate control of dust mites will ultimately result in fewer symptoms.