

## **How to Avoid Allergens**

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### **DESCRIPTION**

Allergens are normally harmless substances that may cause an allergic reaction in people who are sensitive to them. The most common allergens are pollen, mold spores, animal dander, dust and dust mites. Chemical irritants (such as industrial fumes and household cleaning products) and even cold air may contribute to the problem.

It appears that some people inherit a tendency toward allergic reactions. Their immune system looks at allergens as harmful invaders and responds by producing a large amount of an antibody. The antibodies attach themselves to cells that are present in the lining of the nose and eyes. Exposure to an allergen causes the cells to release histamine that bring on the typical symptoms of allergies (allergic rhinitis) - stuffiness, runny nose, itchy eyes and sneezing.

A basic strategy to avoid an allergic reaction is to avoid contact with the offending substances. If you follow the guidelines and the treatment plan your doctor has recommended, you can control allergies.

### **POLLENS**

Pollen is a fertilizing agent of trees, grasses and weeds. Pollen grains are very small and can easily become airborne. Here are a few tips for avoiding pollens:

- Limit outdoor activities, especially when the pollen count is high which is usually early in the morning and on windy days
- Keep windows closed at home and when traveling by car. Use air-conditioning to filter and cool the air
- Change or clean air conditioner filters frequently to prevent pollen and dust from being collected and blown throughout the house.

### **DUST MITES**

These are microscopic creatures that live in carpeting, mattresses and upholstery.

- Minimize use of rugs. Bare wood or tile floors are best
- Use synthetic blankets, pillows and curtains. Wash bedding and curtains frequently in hot water. Use a plastic mattress and pillow cover
- Replace or clean filters on forced-air heating system regularly
- Avoid overstuffed, upholstered furniture, thick shag carpets and stuffed animals
- Use shades rather than venetian blinds.

### **ANIMAL DANDER**

Animal dander is the protein present in animal skin, scales, hair, feathers and saliva. Cats are one of the most common sources of dander. Avoid contact with all pets. Do not allow pets in bedrooms.

### **MOLD SPORES**

The moist, humid areas of your home, the bathrooms and the basement, are potential breeding grounds for mold. Mold reproduces by sending spores into the air.

- Install exhaust fans in bathrooms and kitchen to reduce humidity
- Use a dehumidifier.

### **TOBACCO SMOKE AND OTHER IRRITANTS**

Tobacco smoke, smoke from burning wood or leaves, chemical fumes and other inhaled substances may increase sensitivity to allergens.

- Avoid exposure to smoke and any other substances that may trigger the allergic response