

# Disgusting Dust Mites: Everything You (Didn't) Want To Know

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 [wellnessmama.com/127087/dust-mites/](https://wellnessmama.com/127087/dust-mites/)

It only took a little research into [finding a new mattress](#) to learn more than I ever wanted to know about dust mites. Little critters related to ticks and spiders that live in your pillow, mattress, and furniture? Ugh!

I mean, do you really want thousands of those cringe-worthy little pests in the picture above in your pillow at night? Not me!

Sometimes ignorance really is bliss. But as much as we'd like to pretend dust mites don't exist, their presence can really impact the health and happiness of our homes if we are prone to allergies.

Want to know how to control dust mites and the symptoms they cause? Then read on!

## What Are Dust Mites Anyway?

Dust mites are microscopic eight-legged bugs related to ticks and spiders. They live in our homes and feed on the dead skin cells we shed every day. Basically, they eat our dust.

Since dust mites extract their water from the air, they prefer warm and humid places close to their food source. This makes the places we sit, lie down, exhale, and perspire prime real estate for them. Mattresses, couches, and carpets are dust mite magnets.

What's more, dust mites replicate very quickly. A female dust mite lays over 100 eggs a month in her short 2-3 month life span. In the right conditions you can have a serious dust mite problem in very little time.

Here are some facts you may (or may not!) want to know:

- A used mattress can have between 100,000 and 10 million mites inside.
- A square yard of carpet contains about 100,000 mites.
- One study found an average of 16 types of fungi (a dust mite food) on pillows.
- The particles you might see floating in the air are mostly made up of skin flakes.

Are you grossed out yet? I sure am!

## Do Dust Mites Bite?

Although gross, the good news is dust mites do not bite, carry diseases, or draw blood like some of their relatives. And since we can't see them, most of the time we are blissfully unaware of their presence.

So other than being a creepy thought, why are dust mites a problem?

You might not like the answer!

The real threat is what dust mites leave behind... their waste. There's a lot of it in fact. A single dust mite can lay over 20 droppings a day. And those droppings are chock full of allergens to the human immune system.

As if we needed one more reason not to have them around!

## Am I Allergic to Dust Mites?

The short answer is probably, but it may not be serious.

If anyone in your family has symptoms of congestion, coughing, or watery eyes especially when sleeping or indoors, you may want to consider dust mites as one source of your problems.

Or, if anyone in your family has gastrointestinal issues, you'll want to pay attention to dust mites.

Most urgently- if anyone in your family has asthma, COPD, or a respiratory issue of any kind, dust mites are a very serious issue for you and you'll want to take every step you can to control them.

### Dust Mite Feces: The Real Problem

Dust mite feces (their poop) contain powerful digestive enzymes that actually allow the resourceful dust mite to eat and gain energy from its own waste.

But for humans, these enzymes can be destructive. In fact there are over 20 allergens in a single dust mite waste packet, which can easily enter the human bloodstream when disturbed and sent airborne.

*In 1997 scientists identified the mechanisms by which this digestive enzyme could work its way into the body. Once on the surface of the lungs, Der p1 (the most studied and understood enzyme) attacks and dissolves the 'glue' that holds the cells together. If significant, this breach of lung defences, combined with spillage from undigested contents of the mite's gut, can raise an alarm in the body's immune system which may lead to a 'full-blown' allergic reactions. Following the discovery of the activity of Der p1, doctors soon found that it actually travels within the body and is capable of reaching the fluid surrounding unborn children. (1)*

In fact, studies show that dust mites and the allergic reactions they provoke are [a root cause of asthma in children](#) and can actually cause lung cell death. Prolonged exposure to dust mite allergens can also lead to eczema, gut disease, conjunctivitis, hay fever, and ear problems. (3)

### How To Get Rid of Dust Mites

I'm guessing at this point you're eager to get rid of the dust mites in your home, but unfortunately they can hook themselves firmly into your couch or mattress. Vacuuming does very little to dislodge any of them. (Although you still should vacuum carpet, furniture, and even mattresses to remove their food source, dust.)

If you're not allergic to dust mites you may not need to do much about them. But there's no doubt that decreasing your dust mite exposure could prevent a future allergic problem from developing, and it's always a good idea to take steps to reduce toxins from dust in your home.

There are chemical procedures to reduce dust mites, but of course I'll list only natural methods of attack here!

### Protect Your Mattresses and Bedding

Perhaps the most important step you can take in the war against dust mites is to encase your new mattress or pillow right away in a dust mite blocking mattress cover. (The material is woven so tightly anything over 5 microns can't get through, or get out.)

[Here is an option that doesn't use plastic membranes.](#)

The initial cost will be worth it to guarantee you can use your mattress without allergy problems and rest easy for a long time to come.

## Change and Wash Your Bedding Often

A hot wash and a hot dryer is the best defense. Wash pillows, sheets, blankets, comforters, and mattress pads often. Can't wash it? Put it in the freezer for a night.

## Dust First, Dust Often

Dust before you vacuum so any loose dust will be captured by your vacuum's HEPA filter. Always use a wet cloth rather than dry dusting.

Here's a particularly charming description I guarantee will motivate you the next time you don't feel like dusting:

### *CONSTITUENTS OF HOUSE DUST*

*cigarette ash, incinerator ash, fibers (wool, cotton, paper and silk), fingernail filings, food crumbs, glass particles, glue, graphite, animal and human hair, insect fragments, paint chips, plant parts, pollen, polymer foam particles, salt and sugar crystals, human skin scales, animal dander, soil, fungal spores, tobacco, wood shavings. (4)*

I'm resisting the urge to stop writing and dust right now!

## Use a HEPA Filter Vacuum

While [my favorite vacuum for quick use](#) unfortunately doesn't have a HEPA (High Efficiency Particle Air) filter, I definitely recommend one if you suffer from allergies.

Keep in mind carpet is a dust mite haven no matter how good your vacuum is. Consider replacing carpet with hardwood which is easier to keep dust free and is inhospitable to mites.

## Run a Home Air Filter

Back up your allergen fighting efforts by running an air filter in your home to remove dust particles before they settle.

## Air Out Your Bed

While my husband hates it when I don't make our bed right away, there are some researchers who say it is healthier to leave your bed unmade during the day (I often cling to the hope that I'll be able to climb back in if the kids decide to take a nap!)

*Something as simple as leaving a bed unmade during the day can remove moisture from the sheets and mattress so the mites will dehydrate and eventually die. – Dr. Stephen Pretlove, BBC News, 2005 (2)*

## Use a Dehumidifier

Decrease your indoor humidity to below 50% when possible using dehumidifier. When using a humidifier in the winter, keep it at 35-45% humidity. This will help dehydrate the mites and kill them off.

## Keep It Cool

Keeping your thermostat below 70 degrees Fahrenheit will decrease dust mites. Keeping your windows closed in the summer also reduces pollen in your home, a dust mite food. I recommend this step only if you have an allergy to dust mites, as [indoor air contains more pollution and toxins than outdoor air](#).

**Do you struggle with indoor allergies? Do you think dust mites could be the cause? Please share any remedies that have helped you and your family!**

Sources:

- (1) <http://housedustmite.com/introduction-to-the-dust-mite>
- (2) <http://www.today.com/home/scientists-keep-mites-away-leave-your-bed-unmade-every-day-t43496>
- (3) <http://housedustmite.com/associated-diseases/>
- (4) <http://lancaster.unl.edu/pest/resources/311dusmi.pdf>

# EVERYTHING YOU (DIDN'T) WANT TO KNOW ABOUT



1. THEY LOOK LIKE THIS:
2. AND MAY BE LIVING ALL OVER YOUR HOME:



### **3. THEY DON'T BITE LIKE THEIR RELATIVES (TICKS AND SPIDERS) BUT THEIR WASTE (POOP) CAN LEAD TO ALLERGIES, ASTHMA AND MORE.**

#### **dust mite allergy symptoms**



runny and  
stuffy nose



red itchy  
and teary eyes



cough



itchy throat



tightness  
in chest



sneezing

### **4. IT IS POSSIBLE TO REDUCE OR ELIMINATE THEM WITH SIMPLE METHODS:**

#### **dust mite allergy management**



use hot water for  
washing bed linens



use air purifier



use proof cases



use vacuum cleaner  
with hepa filter



do dust cleaning



use a hygrometer  
to measure the humidity