



HOUSE DUST ALLERGY and HOW TO MAINTAIN CONTROL

People who are sensitive to house dust develop allergic symptoms such as sneezing, itch runny eyes, or a wheezing attack when they are exposed to house dust. This can occur on making beds, dusting, vacuuming, beating mats etc. and on walking out of the house, these symptoms quickly subside, usually within half an hour or so. Patients who have been sensitive to house dust for years notice that although they may wake up in the morning with itchy eyes, a stuffy blocked nose or even perhaps wheezing, these symptoms disappear when they go to work. Sometimes however, one night's exposure to house dust is enough to create symptoms for a day or so i.e. perennial (constant) symptoms, worse in the morning and only tending to clear in the afternoons. Housebound patients of course, may have symptoms all day long because of their daylong exposure.

House dust sensitivity is generally considered to be of less importance in the western dry areas because of the low humidity, but it is the microclimate for the mite that is important. House dust which is sucked up into a vacuum cleaner is a highly complex mixture of woollen, cotton, kapok fibres, moulds, human and animal hairs and danders (skin flakes), food

particles, mixed fragments of insects (particularly cockroaches) and a great variety of substances brought in from outside the house. Eczema children may shed enormous quantities of skin, so the mite content of these homes may be high. There are a number of different types of mites but allergically they are similar. In grain growing areas, patients who have symptoms in stored grain situations – example silos, are often mite sensitive on skin testing because of the cross-reactivity of these insect species.

In Australia, it seems that to be sensitive to house dust really means in most cases you are sensitive to these mites and this can be shown on skin testing. The treatment of house dust allergy is the elimination of the mite and this should be done as thoroughly as possible. Mites thrive readily in an average humidity or 70 – 80 % and temperatures of around 25 – 30 C. So it is of less importance west of the mountains and is more important on the coast. In my experience, mite is not present to a significant degree where the rainfall is less than 10ins (250mms) a year. Remember that normal housekeeping is not sufficient to reduce the mite population.

HOW TO GET RID OF THE MITE:

Eucalyptus Oil KILLS mite – Wash with it (100mls). Remember the dead mite and its faecal pellets are just as allergic as the living mite and the particles are so small they readily pass through most vacuum cleaners, so regular vacuuming, wet-dusting, airing and reducing humidity are very important to reduce load. Home filter units e.g. Electrostatic filter units, Phillips air cleaner, can be helpful in removing airborne allergens.

VACUUM CLEANERS

The problem with these is the filtration system – the most effective and easily available are ones fitted with a High Efficiency Air Filter (such as a HEPA filter). Ducted systems are the gold standard in this regard but it is unaffordable and sometimes unnecessary to spend thousands of dollars on a vacuum cleaner.

BEDROOM

Blankets should be washed regularly and sunned every week or so. Leave the bed un-made for some hours daily to decrease the humidity. If there is no chemical sensitivity cheap foam mattresses are O.K provided they are in the sun every few weeks, but best results seem to be where proper zippered mattress and pillow covers are used. Even new mattresses contain considerable mite allergen after twelve months if this is not done. Mattress covers (Allersearch) are obtainable from your pharmacist, and Mite-Guard equivalents which seem satisfactory.

PETS

Animals must be kept out of the house. Cat allergen is particularly likely to be troublesome and the problem can persist in spite of the removal of the cat.

REMEMBER: FOR BEST CONTROL BEDDING SHOULD BE ENCASED AND FOLLOW THE STEAM CLEAN, MITICIDE ROUTINE IF THERE ARE CARPETS BUT KEEP EVERYTHING IN PROPORTION TO YOUR DEGREE OF PROBLEM.

The presence of house dust allergy symptoms means:

(1) Adequate exposure to mite:

Treatment: Reduce the mite – house dust controls particularly in the bedroom

(2) Adequate sensitivity to mite:

Treatment: The patient can be made less allergic by desensitisation treatment. This involves putting 1 drop of desensitisation solution under the tongue twice a day – see OSNEM for allergy testing and desensitization.