



AllerFocus

Avoidance Therapy

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Once the patient's allergic sensitivities have been defined, educating the patient about minimizing exposure to the identified allergens is an important component of a treatment plan. In fact, following the advice of avoidance therapy has been postulated to improve the patient's quality of life by up to 50 percent.

Avoidance Therapy for Grass, Tree and Weed Pollen Exposure

Taking several precautions during the pollen seasons can help provide for symptom control and decrease the need for medication. When pollen soars, March through September for grass- sensitive patients, July through October for weed pollen-sensitive patients, and February through May for tree pollen-sensitive patients, the following tips can help.

1. Take medications according to your physician's directions.
2. Try to plan for fun activities indoors, especially when the pollen count is high.
3. Avoid other triggers such as cigarette smoke and pet dander exposure (if sensitive), which adds to your trigger load.
4. Wash hair before going to bed to remove pollen that may have settled on it during the day. Spouses of sufferers should do the same.
5. Change your child's clothes after playing outdoors before he/she tracks pollen into the bedroom
6. Encourage family members to keep their shoes at the door.
7. Keep in mind that pollen falls on everything, including your pets, who may carry pollen in their fur. Therefore, bathe your pets more frequently, and keep snuggling to a minimum. Keep pets that have been outdoors out of the bedroom.
8. Avoid hanging clothes outside to dry.
9. Wearing a hat while outside (and removing the hat upon entering the house) can help decrease tracking pollen into the home.
10. Keep windows closed as much as possible in your home and car.
11. Use an air conditioner and change filters frequently.
12. Avoid yard and garden work as much as possible.
13. Avoid outside exercise during the morning hours when pollination is at its peak.

Table 5 below provides information that will enable your patient to minimize dust mite exposure.

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Dust Mite Avoidance Therapy

By utilizing the simple steps listed below, one can diminish exposure to dust mites in the home and work place and thereby improve one's quality of life. Needless to say, this will also result in reducing the symptoms of allergic rhinoconjunctivitis (nasal stuffiness and congestion, itching, running nose, and ocular itching and tearing) that affect those with dust mite sensitivity. Dust mite exposure to allergic individuals has also been associated with the worsening of allergic asthma and atopic dermatitis. In the latter 2 cases, by diminishing the exposure to dust mites, the status of one's asthma and atopic dermatitis significantly improve.

Dust mites are microscopic and can't be seen with the naked eye. They live in pillows, mattresses, rugs, stuffed toys and upholstered furniture and feed off of dead skin cells. They thrive in humid, warm environments, but are present in varying amounts throughout the entire year. Dust mites live for about 3 weeks and each female can produce up to 100 eggs. The mite allergens are prevalent whether the dust mites are alive or dead. Therefore, by reducing exposure in the home and the workplace, you can effectively diminish your symptoms.

1. Acarosan, an anti-dust mite solution, should be sprayed on all rugs and carpets every 4 months. Acarosan is readily available through several web-based dealers. This will effectively diminish the dust mite contents of your rugs. This is less expensive and simpler than the alternative of removing all carpets and installing hard wood floors.
2. By utilizing dust mite impermeable encasements for pillows, mattresses, and box springs, you can minimize dust mite exposure in your bed room. There are many fine commercial encasements available. When purchasing these items, make sure the label states that they will prevent dust mite exposure. Also, check that they will fully encase your pillow, mattress, or box spring completely (e.g. zipped up enclosures). Alternatively, plastic, (zip-up) encasements are less expensive and can also be utilized. However, they will not let water vapor pass through their barrier and this may affect your comfort and promote mold growth on the encased item.
3. Sheets, blankets, and pillow cases should be washed weekly in hot water (> 130degrees F) to kill any new deposition of dust mites. Additionally, these items can be treated with Fabreeze (available in most supermarkets) to maintain a low-dust mite exposure environment.
4. A stuffed toy (e.g. teddy bears) can easily contain dust mites. It is best to either remove these toys or to encase them in plastic to diminish dust mite exposure.
5. Dust mites do not thrive in locations with low humidity. By keeping your air conditioners on, and/or using a dehumidifier, it is possible to get your home's humidity to be less than 50%. At that level, most dust mite will not survive.
6. The dust mite populations within upholstered furniture can be reduced by routinely spraying such furniture with Fabreeze.
7. The use of a vacuum cleaner with a HEPA filter would reduce the carpet or rug content of dust mites. Since the dust mite allergens are relatively heavy and infrequently air borne, air-filtration units will have no significant effect on the dust mite content of a room or carpet.

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Patient Information on Cat and Dog Allergy

Over 6 million Americans suffer with cat and dog allergy. Since these pets, or their allergens, are with you all year long, symptoms are persistent throughout the year, in contrast to pollen allergies (which are seasonal). Even if your pet is not in your house at a particular time, their allergens (cat greater than dog) are airborne and will still affect you. Most patients with allergies to cats and/or dogs can suffer with: itchy, watery nasal symptoms, itchy watery eye symptoms, wheezing, chest tightness and coughing in those with asthma and a cat/dog allergy. Some individuals can also develop an itchy rash secondary to direct contact with cats or dogs (an exacerbation of their atopic dermatitis or urticaria-itchy welts).

Avoidance therapy (as discussed below) will minimize exposure to these allergens and thereby decrease your symptoms:

1. If at all possible have your pet live outdoors.
2. For situations where outdoor living is either not practical or agreed to, try to keep your pet isolated to an area of the house that you are not often in.
3. For cats, the litter box should be maintained outdoors or in an area of the house that you infrequently walk through. The cat allergen is found in the pet's urine, fur, and saliva.
4. Wash the pet weekly, preferably by a family member who is not allergic to the pet. This will result in diminishing the amount of allergen shed by your pet.
5. Understand that if your pet wanders in and out of the house, then outdoor allergens such as tree/grass/weed pollens can adhere to the pet's fur and thereby be brought in the house. The weekly baths will minimize this occurrence.
6. Much of the pet derived allergen exposure occurs by contact with your carpeting, stuffed furniture, curtains, and bedding. By using Fabreeze spray on these items once every 1 to 2 weeks, you can diminish both the pet allergen and dust mite allergen exposure.
7. If you have a guest with pets, or if you visit a home with pets, then the pet allergen (cat greater than dog) can be inadvertently brought back to your home by adhering to your or your guest's clothing. Thus, we recommend that you change clothing near the entrance of your house when returning from an environment where you are exposed to cats and dogs.
8. Please utilize all allergy medications prescribed by your physician. Also, immunotherapy (Allergy Shots) are very effective in minimizing symptoms induced by pet exposure in sensitized individuals.

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Avoidance of Mold Spores

Mold spores are both indoor and outdoor allergens:

1. Reduced exposure to outside mold spores can be achieved by avoiding piles of leaves and dead-decaying plants which are sites of high mold spore counts.
2. Avoiding outdoor activities during times of high mold spore counts will diminish further exposure.
3. Also, diminishing the presence of dense vegetation or plant debris from areas near your home will also lessen allergen exposure.
4. Diminishing indoor mold spore exposure may be accomplished by:
 - a. reducing humidity in the home.
 - b. decreasing the number of indoor plants.
 - c. closing all windows and doors during periods of high mold spore counts.
 - d. utilizing HEPA air conditioning filters and changing the filters monthly.
 - e. if leaks are evident in the house, repair and thoroughly clean the area where the leak was found.