



**Weill Cornell
Medicine**

Minimize Your Allergies by Controlling Your Environment

Avoidance Strategies:



Pollens

Trees pollinate primarily in the spring (sometimes as early as January or February), while grasses pollinate in the early summer. Weeds tend to pollinate in the late summer and fall. It is useful to investigate the types of trees and plants around your house. In general, pollen counts are higher on hot, dry, windy days. Pollen counts decrease during rain, increase after rain, and are highest between the hours of 5am and 10am. Therefore, try to stay indoors during these hours and keep windows and doors closed—even when driving in the car. If you are outside during these times, change your clothes and shower when you return indoors. Air conditioner filters will decrease indoor pollen levels, but air purifiers using High Efficiency Particulate Arresting (HEPA) filters are very effective to use in a single room.

Molds

Molds or fungi are organisms that thrive on decaying organic matter. They are present year-round, indoors and outdoors, especially during the spring and fall. Outdoor mold spores reach their peak level in the early evening as the sun sets, so try and avoid outdoor activities or watering the lawn during this time. A freshly cut lawn, stagnant water, heavy vegetation or decaying vegetation around a house are all significant sources of mold. Indoor molds grow in warm, dark, moist places such as basements, bathrooms, poorly vented laundry rooms, under sinks, in drain pans beneath the refrigerator, in piles of paper, stacks of old books, bird cage droppings, firewood and on indoor plants. Visible mold and mildew should be cleaned with a dilute solution of bleach (one part bleach to 10 parts water or a commercially available brand) and a dehumidifier may be used in damp areas of the house. Clean up all water spills, repair leaks promptly and check the foods stored in the refrigerator for signs of spoilage. All bathrooms should be properly vented.





Dust

Dust mites are microscopic insects that feed on shed particles of human skin and the degenerated residue of upholstery, carpets, mattresses and bedding. It is NOT dirt that has been tracked into the house and dried. Winter is the worst season for dust when low temperatures result in tightly closed houses. Dust mites thrive when the humidity is more than 50%, at lower altitudes and at a comfortable temperature for humans—65° F to 84° F. Their favorite habitats include mattresses, couches, carpets, bedding, pillows and stuffed toys. It is impossible to completely eliminate house dust, but the following steps may be very helpful:

- Avoid cluttered surfaces and shelves with many small, dust-collecting items which are difficult to clean.
- Keep floors bare or use washable throw rugs instead of area rugs and carpets.
- If carpets are unavoidable, vacuuming twice weekly with special filters is recommended. Alternatively, tannic acid can be applied to carpets, but this must be repeated often and may be irritating to some people.
- Cover pillows and mattresses with special barriers available from commercial allergy supply houses.
- Washing draperies and other items at 140° F or placing them in the dryer for 15 minutes at the "HIGH" setting will destroy the dust mite population.

Animal Dander

Animal dander is found on the surface of animals and deposited on anything the animal touches. They are small, light particles which stay airborne even longer than pollens. Cat dander is a very potent allergen and may remain in a house for 6 months or even longer after the cat is removed from the environment. Because animal dander lasts so long, exposure may be through anyone you see on a regular basis such as friends, family members or co-workers. If you are allergic to animals, it is best not to have them in the house. However, if this is not possible, try to create a "safe haven" for yourself by keeping them outside and definitely out of the bedroom. Bathe the pet frequently and wear a mask when you do so. Wash your hands after playing with the pet and don't rub your eyes or nose until your hands have been washed.