

# HOUSE DUST MITES: CONTROLLING EXPOSURE

House dust mites are microscopic and ubiquitous. They feed on human and animal dander, skin scales, and hair. They are frequently found in beds, mattresses, carpets, sofas, and pet bedding. Mites can flourish in the home environment because the temperature and humidity are optimum (50-70% relative humidity).

Hypersensitivity to house dust mites is a common problem for both animals and people. It is difficult and even impossible to eliminate mites from the environment of an allergic pet. An effective environmental control regimen can help to decrease the numbers of mites and therefore minimize your pet's discomfort. Also, hyposensitization therapy (allergy immunotherapy) may be effective in controlling or reducing the clinical symptoms associated with mite allergy.

*The following steps may help control mite populations (special attention should be given to the sleeping areas of the allergic pet):*

- 1 Avoid the use of carpeting. Bare floors, such as hardwood, vinyl, or tile are best; if carpet must be used, low pile is preferable.
- 2 Remove upholstered furniture, books, records, piles of newspapers and magazines, stuffed animals, wall hangings, and other "dust collectors" from the room.
- 3 Use only synthetic material in the pet's bedding. Feathers, wool, or horsehair stuffing should be avoided. Remember, cedar shavings are often a source of allergic dermatitis in the dog.
- 4 Wash all bedding frequently in hot water.
- 5 If your pet sleeps on the bed, encase mattresses and box springs in airtight plastic and seal zippers on these casings with tape. Use washable blankets and mattress pads. The most dust free type of bed is a waterbed!
- 6 Plants can also be "dust collectors" and should be removed.
- 7 Change the furnace and air conditioning filters regularly.
- 8 Electrostatic or HEPA air purifiers may be more effective in filtering out dust, mites, and particles.
- 9 Use air conditioning to control the temperature during warm months. Central air conditioning is preferred, but window units are also helpful. Try to maintain the humidity levels between 30 and 50%. Dehumidifiers may prove beneficial.
- 10 Vacuum floors, wet mop, and dust with a damp cloth daily. The room should be properly aired after vacuuming.
- 11 Groom (preferably outside) and shampoo your pet frequently as directed by your veterinarian.