



Cleaning for People with Allergies

While cleaning is important for everyone to maintain a comfortable and healthy home it is absolutely vital for people who suffer from allergies. By maintaining a regular cleaning routine and following certain practices, you can remove a large proportion of allergens from your environment, such as dust, dust mites, chemical and environmental pollutants, and eliminate many of your allergy symptoms.

Carpets

Carpets are a haven for dust, dirt, dust mites and other allergens so it is critical that they are kept scrupulously clean. This means a regular vacuuming routine, either taking it in turns between family members or if you are really busy, even hiring a cleaner or professional cleaning company.

If you suffer from severe allergies, this will be money well-spent. The longer that dust and dirt remains in the carpet, the deeper it will settle into the carpet fibres, meaning that they will become impossible to remove with normal vacuuming as most vacuums can only cover the top layer of carpet and do not have the capacity to clean deep down into the nooks and crannies.

Invest in a good vacuum, with strong, consistent suction and HEPA (High Efficiency Particulate Arrestance) filters, which trap dirt and also provide an anti-bacterial action. Bagless models are preferred as they do not lose suction as they fill up. Remember, there is no point vacuuming several times a day if it is not actually reaching the dirt and dust trapped in the carpets.

At least twice a year (e.g. spring and autumn), hire a steam cleaner or get professionals to come and deep clean your carpet. Hot water and cleaning solution will be injected deep into the carpet fibres and mixed with the dirt, then sucked back up into the machine, along with any ingrained dust, dirt and grime.

To keep dirt and dust in your carpets to a minimum, remove your shoes at the door (and ask your guests to do likewise) – just this simple action can make a big difference to keeping your carpets cleaner. If you are expecting a visitor who suffers from allergies, it is actually a bad idea to vacuum right before they arrive as the action will stir up dust into the room and create a dust-



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filled air system for them to breathe in. Try to vacuum the day before so that any dust and dirt that has been stirred up (and not effectively removed) has a chance to settle back down before your guest arrives.



Bedrooms

Bedrooms are the other key areas for allergy sufferers. Most pillows are infested with dust mites, which you breathe in as you sleep every night. Buy some allergen-impermeable, dust-proof casings for your pillows, mattresses and duvets and avoid things like foam rubber mattresses and pillows as these are more likely to harbour mould. Wash your bed linen and blankets every other week and use the hot water cycle, as this will kill any dust mites.

It is best to remove wall-to-wall carpeting from your bedroom if you suffer from serious allergies, as not only do carpets harbour a multitude of allergens but they are also the single most chemically-treated item in any household. If you have air vents in your bedroom (e.g. from a central air conditioner or heater), check the vents periodically to make sure that they are clean and free of dust.

Choose shades instead of heavy curtains and blinds for your windows as the former is less likely to accumulate allergens. If you do have to use curtains, make sure that you wash them frequently and if you have blinds, to clean them often.

Things like wall hangings, stuffed animals and even piles of clothing, towels, linen, etc, are all dust collectors so eliminate these if you suffer from severe allergies. Keep them in cupboards and wardrobes, with the doors shut, and wash any washable stuffed animals on display frequently in hot water.

General Tips

While cleaning is important, it is actually best for the allergy-sufferer not to do extensive house-cleaning themselves because the cleaning processes often stir up lots of dust, dander and other allergens which will trigger the symptoms. Ask or bribe other members of the household to help, especially with the really “dirty” jobs such as vacuuming beneath the bed and cleaning air vents.

If you do have to do it yourself, then make sure that you wear a high-quality dust mask and wear rubber gloves. Wear old clothes during cleaning and wash them immediately afterwards in hot water. Take a shower straight away after you have finished your cleaning chores.

Feather dusters are actually not a good idea as they only stir up dust and add more airborne allergens to your environment. Instead, use a damp cleaning cloth to wipe over dusty areas and “capture” the dust first, before it drifts up into the air.

Remember, while cleaning your home won't remove all the allergens, it will significantly reduce them and thus your symptoms, making you feel better overall.