

Room-by-Room Checklist for Allergy Cleanup

Simple changes in your home's furnishings and a thorough cleaning – with an emphasis on allergy triggers – will leave you breathing easier. Here's a look at the major areas to tackle in each room of your home.

Bedroom

This is a dust mite's home base, thanks to the proliferation of shed skin. Whether you notice it or not, your skin flakes – and that produces a mite's favorite meal. Be especially diligent here:

- Remove carpeting if asthma or dust allergies are severe.
- Dust frequently with a damp cloth or furniture-dusting product. Begin cleaning up high and work your way lower in the room.
- Vacuum weekly using a double-bagged, HEPA filtered vacuum cleaner.
- Launder curtains regularly; better yet, replace curtains with shades. Avoid blinds – they're dust magnets.
- Get rid of dust collectors, such as magazines, knickknacks and stuffed animals, or store them in closed boxes or cloth or canvas bags.
- Keep dressers and nightstands clear of clutter.
- Encasing pillows and mattresses in mite proof covers is very effective.
- Launder sheets and pillows* weekly in warm water; tumble dry. Blankets, comforters and mattress pads should be washed monthly.
- Vacuum both sides of the mattress* for at least two minutes twice monthly to reduce the dust and allergens in the mattress.
- Keep furry or feathered pets out. If one takes a catnap on the bed, wash the bedding as soon as possible.

*if not encased in mite proof covers

Kitchen:

Mold and mildew are your biggest challenges here.

- Keep under-sink cabinets and countertops clean and dry.
 - Clean regularly using a disinfectant (antibacterial) cleaner formulated to kill mildew.
 - Moisture inside the fridge makes it prime breeding ground for mold. Clean the walls and shelves regularly using a nonabrasive, all-purpose cleaner or a solution of baking soda and water.
 - Wipe up water that accumulates in the crisper drawers, and clean them regularly.
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Bathroom:

More mold-and-mildew patrol here. The warm, wet environs are prime growing grounds for these two unsightly interlopers. To help prevent this growth, repair any leaks, use the exhaust fan after bathing, keep air circulating and keep the surfaces clean and dry.

- Shower curtains need regular care. Wash fabric curtains with detergent and liquid bleach (or the color-safe variety). Presoak heavily mildewed areas in $\frac{1}{4}$ cup bleach and 1 gallon of water. Vinyl shower curtains should be scrubbed with liquid bleach or a mildew remover before washing. Don't put them in the dryer.
- After showering, sponge or squeegee dry the shower walls.
- Keep the shower stalls and bathtubs clean using a non-abrasive all-purpose or disinfectant cleaner.
- Mold-and-mildew patrol requires a mildew remover. Use in a well-ventilated area; most shouldn't be used by an asthma sufferer. Disinfectant cleaners used two or three times a week will prevent mildew from getting a toehold in the future.

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Living and Family Rooms:

Here you'll often find a potpourri of dust and dust mites, animal dander, pollen and mold and mildew.

- Vacuum weekly with an allergen-control vacuum – more often if you have a pet and during heavy allergy seasons. Go against the carpet's nap, taking a minimum of six to eight strokes over each area. Empty or replace the bag when it is half full. (Fuller bags result in less suction power, meaning a less-efficient vacuuming session.) Assign this task to someone other than the allergy sufferer. Or wear a disposable dust mask. The allergic resident should stay out of the area for 30 minutes after vacuuming.
 - Area rugs should be used in front of all entryways to trap and hold dust and dirt and keep outdoor allergens as far away from the living areas as possible. Regularly shake them outdoors and away from open windows and your face. Launder them weekly to remove dust and dust mites, animal dander, pollen and mold spores.
 - Vacuum wood floors.
 - Dust regularly with a damp cloth or furniture-dusting product. Dry dusting send dust spiraling into the air and back down on your surfaces.
 - Launder curtains frequently to remove dust and dust mites.
 - Clean window frames and sills regularly. Be on the lookout for condensation, mold and mildew.
 - Regularly wash soft, machine-washable toys.
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Attic and Basement:

Mold, mildew, dust and dust mites reside here happily, thanks to the usually warm, dark and moist atmosphere.

- Store items in plastic boxes or closed cloth bags.
 - If mold and mildew are a recurring problem, use a dehumidifier to keep the relative humidity between 35 percent and 50 percent.
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