

Indoor allergies can flare during the dog days of summer

July 27 2016, by Dipali Pathak

During the dog days of the summer, many people might find themselves staying indoors more often to avoid the heat and humidity, but a Baylor College of Medicine expert warns that there may be something to be cautious of when staying indoors: allergens. He offers tips for reducing indoor allergens and some treatment options.

"In terms of [indoor allergens](#), the things that we worry about the most are mites, particularly dust mites, which accumulate in fabrics such as carpets, mattresses and pillows," said Dr. David Corry, professor and chief of the section of immunology, allergy, and rheumatology at Baylor.

Other insects, such as cockroaches, that tend to congregate in the house also can cause allergies as can the buildup of fungus, which tends to thrive in the same areas as [dust mites](#), Corry said.

"There's an ecosystem at work in which mites and fungi mutually feed off of each other and may support each other's growth," said Corry.

"Every house has these organisms to some extent."

Corry said that simply being in the house more, whether walking around or even sitting or lying in bed, can stir up the remains of these organisms. Inhaling them or rubbing them into the skin can trigger allergic reactions including allergic rhinitis, asthma and even skin conditions such as eczema.

The best way to inhibit the buildup of these materials is to get rid of fixed cloth-based textiles as much as possible. For those with [severe allergies](#), this can include getting rid of carpeting in the home and replacing it with hard surfaces for floors.

While throw rugs are acceptable to have in the home, Corry recommended cleaning these rugs with a dry vacuum and avoiding liquid based vacuum cleaners, which wet the rug and promote the overgrowth of fungus and the rapid re-accumulation of mites in the long run.

Since it can be cost prohibitive to change all of the flooring in a home, Corry makes the following additional suggestions for those who suffer severe indoor allergies:

- Buy a vacuum cleaner with a HEPA (high efficiency particulate arresting) filter
- Look for alternatives to cloth-based furniture, or clean cloth-based furniture using vacuum attachments regularly
- Have a room HEPA filter, which helps keep particulate matter out of the air

Corry also reminds to be aware of the use and inspection of an [air conditioner](#).

"Air conditioners can sometimes become heavily contaminated with mold, so when the air conditioner is turned on, it can blow mold spores into the air," said Corry.

He emphasized the importance of having an annual inspection of the entire system and particularly the duct work for signs of mold. Corry also suggested having older homes inspected for other mold issues, which can arise from water intrusions due to rain or leaky pipes. Any mold problems that are identified should be immediately repaired.

To determine whether allergies or asthma might be related to the home environment, Corry said to be aware of the pattern and timing of symptoms. For example, if symptoms are occurring outside of the home, such as in the workplace, but there's a relief from symptoms when at home, then the problem may be in the outdoors or the workplace. However, if the opposite is true and symptoms such as runny nose, sneezing, itchy and watery eyes and asthma attacks are disrupting sleep or are worse in the morning, this could indicate that the problem is in the home.

The standard approach to treating allergies is using an inhaled nasal steroid or an antihistamine. Rinsing the nose and sinuses with salt water also is helpful and can be done through a neti pot or saline spray.

Corry also recommended that people with severe allergies get tested to determine the cause of the allergies. This will allow doctors to treat using immunotherapy or allergy shots, which desensitize individuals to the allergens by exposing them to the allergen in small doses that are gradually increased. This resets the body's immune response to the allergens.

Finally, for those with severe allergic disease that is not responsive to standard therapy and prevention, research from Corry's laboratory suggests that in many instances such disease is due to a fungal infection of the airway, termed airway mycosis. If airway mycosis can be demonstrated through culturing of airway secretions or other means, patients should be considered for treatment with antifungals, a type of antibiotic that is specific for fungi.

Provided by Baylor College of Medicine

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