



One in three people in the UK suffers from an allergy. The numbers are increasing every year, and up to half of those affected are children.

Any substance that triggers an allergic reaction is called an allergen. Some of the most common allergens include pollen, house dust mites, mould, pets, wasps and bees, industrial and household chemicals, and foods such as milk and eggs. Less common allergens include nuts, fruit, and latex.

Symptoms of allergy can include sneezing, runny nose, itchy eyes, wheezing, coughing and skin rashes. The types of symptoms you experience depend on how you encountered with the allergen. For example, you may have difficulty breathing if you inhaled pollen. Common allergic disorders include: Hayfever, Eczema and asthma.

Some people are more likely to develop an allergy because it runs in their family. If this is the case, you're said to be a-topic, or to have atopy. Boys are more likely to develop atopy than girls, as are babies who have a low birth weight. In very rare cases, an allergy can lead to a severe reaction called anaphylactic shock, which can be fatal.

An important way of controlling your allergy symptoms is to reduce the allergens in your home by cleaning thoroughly and often. If you have an allergy, take as much care in reducing the number of allergens in your home as you do in avoiding allergens outside, say experts.

THE IMPACT OF ALLERGY

According to Allergy UK research, common allergens associated with house dust mites, pets and, to a lesser extent, pollen, are found in most homes in the UK. They have more of an impact on the lives of allergy sufferers than previously realised.

The study found that 4 in 10 (41%) of allergy sufferers will avoid visiting a relative or friend's house because they're scared that being in their home may trigger allergic symptoms.

ALLERGY HOTSPOTS

The most common indoor allergens in UK homes are:

- house dust mites
- pet allergens, from cats and dogs
- moulds Some pollen can get in from outside during the summer and may cause a problem for anyone with hay fever.

House dust mite allergen is most associated with bedrooms, but the allergen can settle on surfaces and spread around the house.

Allergens from outside (i.e., pollen particles and pet dander) can infiltrate the home through the air and through open doors and windows. They also make their way inside by sticking to clothes, skin, and hair. Once inside the home, they circulate in the air and settle on soft furnishings and hard surfaces.

REDUCING THE THREAT

So, how can you reduce the allergens in your home?

Thorough and frequent cleaning, especially of the areas of the house you spend the most time in. Few other tips are:

- Damp dust the hard surfaces in your home. Don't forget places that gather dust and tend to get neglected, such as the top of picture frames, the backs of sinks, and so on.
- Vacuum carpets and hard floors daily if possible, and soft furnishings twice a week. Don't forget to vacuum under your bed (where the house dust mite allergen gathers).
- Use a barrier mattress cover on beds. They're also available for pillows and duvets.
- Vacuum your mattress and pillows and wash bedding and duvets above 55°C (or put bedding, duvets and soft toys into a plastic bag and put it in the freezer for 24 hours).

TO REDUCE PET ALLERGENS:

- Don't allow pets in bedrooms, and keep them out of the living room if possible.
- Wash your pets once or twice a week.

TO REDUCE INDOOR POLLEN:

- Keep pollen out of your home by keeping windows closed. Be aware that you can bring pollen in from outside if it sticks to your hair and clothes. Change your clothes the moment you get in, put them in a plastic bag until you can put them in the washing machine, have a shower and wash your hair.
- Wipe down pets when they come in the house after playing outside