

## Indoor Allergies – October 2011

As the winter days arrive and we spend more time indoors, it is important to make sure this time is as allergy-free as possible. With 1 in 4 people in the UK suffering from allergies, the risk of you suffering one way or another is pretty high, each year the numbers are increasing by 5% with as many as half of all those affected being children. Hay fever sufferers might suffer for the duration of the summer; indoor allergens have the potential to keep you miserable all year long!

### What is Allergy?

The term allergy is used to describe a response, within the body, to a substance, which is not necessarily harmful in itself, but results in an immune response and a reaction that causes symptoms and disease in a predisposed person, which in turn can cause inconvenience.

An allergy is everything from a runny nose, itchy eyes and palate to skin rash. It aggravates the sense of smell, sight, tastes and touch causing irritation, extreme disability and sometimes fatality. It occurs when the body's immune system overreacts to normally harmless substances.

### What causes an Allergy?

Allergic reactions are caused by substances in the environment known as allergens; almost anything can be an allergen for someone. Allergens contain protein, which is often regarded as a constituent of the food we eat; in fact it is an organic compound, containing hydrogen, oxygen and nitrogen, which form an important part of living organisms.

#### The most common allergens are:

- Pollen from trees and grasses
- House dust mite
- Moulds
- Pets such as cats and dogs
- Insects like wasps and bees
- Industrial and household chemicals
- Medicines
- Foods such as milk and eggs.

#### Less common allergens include:

- Nuts
- Fruit
- Latex



There are some non-protein allergens which include drugs such as penicillin. For these to cause an allergic response they need to be bound to a protein once they are in the body.

An allergic person's immune system believes allergens to be damaging and so produces a special type of antibody (IgE) to attack the invading material. This leads other blood cells to release further chemicals (including histamine) which together cause the symptoms of an allergic reaction.

#### The most common symptoms are:

- Sneezing
- Runny nose
- Itchy eyes and ears
- Severe wheezing
- Coughing
- Shortness of breath
- Sinus problems
- A sore palate
- Nettle-like rash.



It should be understood that all the symptoms mentioned can be caused by factors other than allergy, indeed some of the conditions are diseases in themselves. When asthma, eczema, headaches, lethargy, loss of concentration and sensitivity to everyday foods such as cheese, fish and fruit are taken into account the full scale of allergy can be appreciated. Ensure you consult your GP for accurate guidance if you have any concerns about allergies.

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### Shocking facts;

- A room temperature above 25 degrees will encourage house dust mites to grow, causing air pollution indoors.
- We sweat a third of a litre of water at night to provide the perfect environment for house dust mites, this can replicate mould effects and aggravate the side effects of allergens.
- Do you have pets? If so they could also be part of the problem! Cats, for example, lick their fur coating themselves all over in the allergen. We all know cats are nosy and love to investigate anything and everything – meaning that the allergens can end up everywhere! Feathers can also be a nuisance – so if you have a parrot or another type of bird and feel particularly sneezy, then you might want to look no further!
- The house dust mite can affect air quality indoors and cause side effects such as congestion, shortness of breath, itchy eyes, poor sleeping and headaches.
- Indoor allergies tend to be at their worst in the late summer, when dust mites are at their peaks.
- Allergy symptoms can actually be worse in the winter when the windows are closed and people are shut in with the allergens.



**For further information on allergies, please see the websites listed below or visit your General Practitioner**

[www.allergyuk.org](http://www.allergyuk.org)

[www.talkallergy.com](http://www.talkallergy.com)