

Nighttime sniffles: creepier than you think

by Dr. Delia Chiramonte, [Baltimore Health Examiner](#)



Courtesy of American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology

Are you stuffed up first thing in the morning? Does your nose run all night long? Your allergy symptoms may not be from pollen or grass. You might be allergic to the tiny, creepy, microscopic creatures that share your bed at night. Actually, to be precise, you might be allergic to their poop.

Dust mites, pictured above, eat the skin cells that you shed and then leave their excrement in your pillow, sheets and blankets. As you lay your head down on the pillow, tiny poofs of dust mite detritus float up around your head. If you aren't allergic to it, you won't notice a thing (although now that I've mentioned it, it might cross your mind tonight once the lights go out). However, if you are allergic to dust mites this nightly exposure can lead to nasal congestion, runny nose, itchy eyes, postnasal drip, worsening asthma and difficulty sleeping. If you've been using the same pillow, mattress, and bedspread for some time you may be sleeping with 10 million bedmates. That's a lot of poop.

The best way to treat dust mite allergy is to decrease your exposure to the mites and their excrement. You spend the most time in your bedroom, so you can make the biggest impact there. Try these tips:

- Start by purchasing allergy covers for your pillows, mattress, and box spring. These can really make a difference! They are impermeable to dust mites and thus prevent the mites from burrowing into the pillows and mattresses.
- Wash sheets, pillowcases, and blankets in hot water and dry in a hot drier every week.
- Wash and dry stuffed animals in hot water every week if they are kept on the bed.

- Vacuum weekly, using a vacuum with a HEPA filter.

These interventions may be enough to control your allergy symptoms. If not, adding medications may help. Over the counter antihistamines such as Benadryl may decrease your allergic symptoms and the sleepiness side effect is acceptable at night as long as you wake up alert. Claritin, another over the counter medicine, is much less likely to cause drowsiness. There are many prescription oral medicines such as Zyrtec, Clarinex and others that can effectively control symptoms without drowsiness. In addition, nasal steroids (such as Nasonex, Flonase and others) put the medicine right where you need it to control a runny and stuffy nose. For itchy eyes you can try an ophthalmic antihistamine such as Patanol. If you are still suffering, other options include leukotriene inhibitors such as Singulair and even allergy shots.

But by far the safest and most important intervention involves decreasing the population of your tiny, icky bedmates. Cover your bedding and wash whatever isn't strapped down. You can get the covers at department stores or online specialty allergy sites such as [AlerG](#).

Try not to think about the tiny creatures munching on your skin right now. If you get a pillow cover today you won't have to imagine the dust mite explosion surrounding your head as it hits the pillow tonight.

Sweet dreams!

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