

# Indoor allergies: Simple changes in the home can make a difference

By KRISTEN COUNTS  
Special to the Record-Eagle

What can an allergy sufferer do at home to decrease exposure to allergens (substances that cause an allergic reaction) and relieve aggravating symptoms?

Having suffered from allergies for 26 years, Penny Campo-Pierce of Traverse City has become a self-educated expert on indoor allergies. Itchy eyes, a runny nose, post-nasal drip and congestion prompted her to make some changes in her home, including hot water heating and frequent cleaning with professional dust cloths.

"Each time I make a change to reduce my exposure to allergens in my environment, it gets better," said Campo-Pierce.

"Environmental controls will always be the safest way to treat (indoor allergies), because your benefits will always outweigh your risks," said Jill Polmateer, a nurse at allergist Richard C. Schultz, Jr.'s office, where Schultz is a patient. "When changes are made in the home, patients can notice a change pretty quickly."

The most common allergic offenders in the home are dust mites, molds and pets. Dust mites are microscopic organisms that live in mattresses, pillows, carpeting and other locations

throughout the home.

To decrease her exposure to dust mites, Lisa Danto of Suttons Bay uses a number of preventative measures. As a nurse and allergy sufferer, she has taken the time to educate herself. In Danto's bedroom, the mattress, box-springs and pillows are all encased with a fabric that contains the mites.

"The bedding is cleaned regularly, and we recently purchased a heavy-duty vacuum cleaner."

Danto's husband does the vacuuming when she is not in the house, to keep her from being exposed to any allergens that the vacuum vents out. To further reduce her exposure to dust, her husband also cleans their home.

"It (decreasing allergen exposure) certainly has been more of a burden to my husband," commented Danto.

"The most important change to make is to the bedroom because you spend the most time there," said Polmateer.

Her suggestions for decreasing exposure to dust mites include washing bedding weekly at 130 degrees or higher, avoiding heavy drapes, vacuuming every week, and keeping stuffed animals and clothes put away.

"I've had patients who have had extreme allergy treatments without much relief for dust mite allergy; they put the allergy covers on their bed, and come back

in two weeks and feel better," said Polmateer.

She also recommends changing furnace filters monthly. Vents should be professionally cleaned at least every other year, or a hose attachment can be used to vacuum them out about three times a year. Polmateer also suggests putting cheesecloth over the vents; change them once a month. A high quality vacuum cleaner is also recommended.

Many changes can be made in the winter home to prevent mold growth.

"To prevent mold growth in the bathroom, you should run the bathroom fan and use a squeegee to get rid of excess water after showering," suggested Danto.

Her husband empties the compost bucket because doing this would expose her to mold.

Polmateer suggests taking care of all water leaks in the home. Use a 10 percent bleach solution to clean areas where mold has accumulated, such as on windowsills.

"In the winter, it's important to keep ice and snow off of the roof to prevent water damage and mold growth," she added.

A dehumidifier should be used in the basement. If you use a humidifier in the winter, Polmateer says that the humidity needs to stay under 50 percent to discourage the growth of mold and dust mites.

"A humidifier should be

cleaned weekly with a 10 percent bleach solution for 20 minutes. Otherwise, you're spewing mold into the environment," said Polmateer.

In a home where the allergen may be a best friend, avoiding a pet is impossible for some people. Most pet owners don't wish to relegate their treasured companions to the cold outdoors and the idea of giving the pet away can be unthinkable.

Polmateer mentioned a number of things that can be done to make it easier to live with furry friends. Dogs should be bathed and cats wiped down monthly.

"Cleaning the house about twice a week is a good idea because of all of the hair," she said.

Dogs should be well groomed and always kept off of the furniture. Hands should be washed after petting a cat or dog.

Danto and her husband were unable to give up their cat so Danto takes medication to control her symptoms.

In the winter, another allergy culprit can be the beloved, real Christmas tree.

However, Campo-Pierce has no regrets when she puts up her artificial tree, knowing that a real one would make her feel terrible.

Technically, second-hand smoke is an irritant to some people with allergies, not an allergen in itself. Polmateer encourages those who are allergic to stay away from it,

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## Home repairs are no longer a guy thing

Day-to-day maintenance isn't gender-specific. A leaking faucets doesn't care whether it's considered a "guy thing" to repair it. And a finished wallpaper job doesn't reveal itself as "women's work."

Nowhere is this truer than among a fast-growing segment of homeownership: single women. As women find out all too quickly when something goes wrong at home, their options are to hire the work out or do it themselves. Apparently, more opt to roll up their sleeves and dive in.

The learning curve for how-to skills is shorter than you might think. Advice to first-timers: Try your hand at routine tasks before inevitable repairs or emergencies arise.

This may be as simple as tightening screws on cabinet doors, hammering in exposed deck nails, filling nail holes in walls with spackle or oiling squeaky hinges.

As skills — and can-do confidence — grow, the decisions about personally making repairs or hiring professionals can be made

on a case-by-case basis. However true emergencies, such as electrical, heating and cooling breakdowns are best left to specialists.

For most single homeowners, it all starts with basic tools for basic tasks. A short list of equipment includes:

- Tape measure.
- Cordless rechargeable screwdriver (with Phillips and flat heads).
- Extension cord and work light.
- Hammer.
- Pliers, plain and locking type.
- Cordless drill and assorted drill bits.
- Work gloves.
- C-clamps in various sizes.

The best advice, however, might be that, when in doubt, ask for help. Check your qualms and misgivings at the door the moment your walk into a home-improvement store. The mindset of stores now is that there are no questions that are too basic. There are plenty of store associates to answer questions and how-to brochures, books and instant help available.

### Spring Cleaning

Move over, Mr. Clean, Ms. Clean is on the scene. Jenny Botero, director of housekeeping operations for Marriott International, oversees 20,000 housekeepers for 426,000 hotel rooms worldwide. Here are her tips for easier spring cleaning:

- Stretch. Stretching can prevent pulled muscles and fatigue. Cleaning is a great source of exercise.
- Direct route. Save time by carrying cleaning items in a bucket and tidying the room in a clockwise direction.
- Squeegee. It's faster than using a towel and leaves mirrors and windows streak-free.
- Share the load. Take turns cleaning and maintaining with your family or housemates. If one scrubs the kitchen on Saturday, the other can empty the dishwasher all week.

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