





itchy, scratchy, sneezy

Does your cat make you sneeze, do cleaning products make you wheeze, and does the arrival of spring bring the sniffles? Here's some simple ways to handle allergies in the home.

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One in three of us suffer from allergies of one sort or other, caused by anything from pollen to peanuts, drugs to cat fur. Allergy symptoms can range from merely irritating to life-threatening, and while it's easy to avoid some allergens, tracking down the cause of others can be a tortuous process.

This is especially true when it comes to the places we call home. Our houses and gardens can be battlefields in the fight for our family's health. Dust mites, mould spores and pollen are all common causes of allergies, and eliminating them can seem nigh on impossible at times.

Never fear. Armed with a little knowledge, it is possible to minimise allergens and help keep your family allergy free.

Pesky little mites

It may be an alarming thought, but every one of us shares our homes with thousands of eight-legged intruders. Dust mites may be microscopic, but they cause no end of irritation to thousands. It's estimated that the mattresses we sleep on carry one million dust mites, so it's no wonder that sufferer's symptoms intensify at night time.

Feeding on human and animal skin, dust mites produce proteins that can cause sneezing, itchy eyes and asthma. They can also cause eczema. Dust mites love humidity, and places with high year-round mugginess have the greatest concentration of these pesky little mites.

Having a bath or shower before bed helps to minimise the amount of skin flakes that fall from us in the night, thus limiting the dust mite's food source. Dust-mite mattress covers are also useful, as is keeping the house well-ventilated.

Use a vacuum cleaner with good suction and filters to keep dust mites at bay. One easy home remedy is to put a recently used

tea-bag in the cleaner bag each time you vacuum.

Four-legged friends

While eight-legged critters are the number one cause of household allergies, our four-legged friends can also wreck havoc on our sinuses. Allergic reaction to cats is common. Caused by a protein present in cat's saliva, this allergen is very sticky, and can be carried on clothes from place to place. Long haired, short haired or bald – this protein is present in all cats.

As pets are an integral part of the family, getting rid of them is often not an option, so limiting exposure is usually the best bet. Research indicates that regularly bathing cats can help reduce the level of allergens on the fur. Your cat may hate it, but it'll stop the sneezing – just watch out for the claws!

Keep your cat outside for long periods, and limit the parts of the house in which cats can go. As cat dander settles on carpets, replacing this with wooden flooring or vinyl can reduce the level of allergens.

And don't forget the golden rule, keep your home well ventilated, all year round.

Breaking the mould

There's nothing as nice as a hot bath, but sadly we human's aren't the only ones who savour a bit of a soak. Mould thrives in our moisture-filled bathrooms, and the spores it produces can cause problems.

Keep your bathroom well ventilated to reduce the level of mould. Extractor fans are ideal; otherwise make sure you have a window open whenever you bathe or shower.

Towels can also harbour mould, so it's important to change them regularly. Heated towel rails can help to keep them dry in between washes.

Mouldy fruit also contains troublesome

spores, so make sure your fruit is always fresh, and not too ripe. And if you use a dehumidifier, ensure the drip tray is always free from mould.

Another way to combat mould in susceptible areas is to paint kitchens and bathrooms with a Resene Kitchen & Bathroom paint formulated with anti-bacteria silver and MoulDefender. This discourages mould from growing on painted surfaces but if you already have a problem, Resene Moss & Mould Killer is a great way to treat it.

Clean and green

We live in a chemical world, and as asthma sufferers know, fumes from fly sprays, cleaning products and home furnishings can trigger attacks. Aside from avoiding those you know irritate your nose, make sure you wear gloves when cleaning... although not thin latex ones as these are made from rubber tree sap and can cause eczema and respiratory problems.

When renovating or redecorating, it's important to ensure that the products you use don't get you wheezing and reaching for your inhaler. There are now many building and home products marketed as more human-friendly, as well as many eco and human-friendly principles on which to build a new home. >



Showering before bed and using a vacuum cleaner with strong suction and good filters helps eliminate allergy-causing dust mites.

Resene Zylone Sheen VOC Free is a low-sheen, interior paint that is VOC-free and perfect for use in homes where allergies are an issue.

Resene has developed a range of low and no VOC paints (VOC stands for volatile organic compounds), which are low odour and can help prevent asthma, headaches, nausea and allergic reactions associated with higher VOC products. Resene Zylone Sheen VOC Free is a low-sheen, interior paint that is VOC-free and perfect for use in homes where allergies are an issue. It's available in a wide range of colours from Resene ColorShops and resellers.

Spring sniffles

Hay fever (or seasonal allergic rhinitis) is caused by airborne pollens, and usually starts just as the weather warms up. While it's very difficult to avoid airborne pollen altogether, staying inside when pollen levels are at their highest can definitely help. Morning from 5am-10am is the time when most pollen is

emitted. Have your lawn mowed frequently as it minimises the flowering plants that produce pollen.

When planning and planting your garden, go for low-allergy varieties, such as native plants. Using stones or gravel instead of organic matter as a mulch can cut down on mould spores that cause allergies.

Choose disease-resistant varieties of plants, as black spot and mildew also produce irritating mould spores.

For more information on how to minimise the levels of allergen, see the Allergy New Zealand website, www.allergy.org.nz, or www.healthinsite.gov.au/topics/Allergies_and_Hypersensitivities. For information on Resene's range of VOC-free paints, see the Resene website, www.resene.com or visit your local Resene ColorShop or reseller. **H**

Rating our homes

Work is now underway to develop a single rating tool to assess the comfort and performance of new and existing homes.

A partnership has been formed between the New Zealand Green Building Council (NZGBC), BRANZ and Beacon Pathway to develop a system that will assess the performance of our homes, provide information for homeowners who are considering improvements, and provide a performance scale that creates value around warm, healthy and efficient homes.

The tool will also provide a framework to help deliver Government housing initiatives, such as the home insulation fund, and provide achievable and consistent advice on standards to help the building and construction industry.

Overseas research shows homes with performance ratings sell and rent faster, for higher prices than non-rated homes. The UK, Europe and North America have developed similar rating tools. The rating tool is expected to be launched in mid 2010.

