

Do you wake up on winter mornings with your eyes itchy and swollen, sniffing and wheezing? If you do, it is not your usual pollen allergy. Central heating and effective insulation, the creature comforts which make cold weather more bearable, are also popular with another creature: the house dust mite, which is the number one allergen in every home.

Years ago, mattresses would be taken outside on a cold day and beaten for about half an hour. But as that is not possible with our modern designs made up of springs and rubber, we tend to forget that mattresses need cleaning, too.

In fact, the mattress is probably the most favoured place by dust mites: there are up to two million in an average bed. Each one produces 20 pellets of excrement each day and 85% of asthmatics are allergic to it.

The contamination of our mattresses also aggravates bronchitis, sinusitis, rhinitis, dermatitis, eczema and other



feasible. Wipe condensation from inside windows and air your mattresses at least once a month.

Pillows and duvets also harbour dust mites. If they are filled with a synthetic filling and are washable, then clean them frequently. You can put pillows into a plastic bag in the freezer (if you have one large enough) for several hours now and again, in between washes.

If you cannot do this, hang them outside in cool, fresh air from time to time and treat with a spray such as HealthGuard's Total Hygiene DMI, which costs from £14.99.

Children's soft toys also contain dust mites. About once a month, put soft toys in the freezer for a minimum of six hours – to kill the mites – then wash them.

Leave the bed open to air before remaking it and open windows in the bedroom. You can simplify your home interior – the more clutter



FIGHTING THE DUST MITE

Winter can be just as much a trigger for allergic reactions as the spring pollen season. So what can you do about it? **Jenny Pierce** finds out

respiratory and skin disorders.

Every time you turn over in bed, your mattress, pillows and duvet produce dust (mite debris and particles of skin mostly) which you inhale. But help is at hand. There is a new house dust mite monitoring device, **ActivAllergy Mite-Alert**, which detects house dust mite "hot spots" in your home. The mini-vac collects dust samples into a credit card-sized test unit, which contains a chemical solution that measures the allergen level.

● A mini-vac and two test cassettes costs £24.95. Refill packs, at £29.95, contain five of the test cassettes. Call 01353-654111 (or visit the website at: www.omnitra.co.uk).

But what to do if you find your mattress, sofa and carpets are full of dust mites? A new service called **The Mattress Doctor** could be the answer. You book an appointment with them and arrange for an operator to visit your home. He will use the mite-alert to determine the problem first.

The treatment consists of using a power head vacuum which generates high frequency waves to pulverise and loosen particles of dust, dirt and residues in the mattress.

These are then eliminated with a high power vacuum system incorporating

radiation sterilising unit is then used to clean the mattress, killing bacteria, viruses and spores.

Finally the mattress is treated with a **Mattress Hygiene Spray**, based on several natural ingredients which are antibacterial, antimicrobial, fungicidal and insect repellent. You can continue the good work by spraying your mattress every week.

● **Contact The Mattress Doctor Ltd**, 8 Mountbatten Drive, Ringstead, Northamptonshire NN14 4TX (0845-123 5160; e-mail: www.matdoc.co.uk).

HOW DO YOU CONTROL DUST MITES IN YOUR HOME?

Dust mites flourish in warm, damp conditions, so keep your home well ventilated by opening windows, in the bedroom, bathroom and kitchen particularly, whenever possible. But do close the doors of steamy bathrooms and kitchens in order to stop dampness spreading to other parts of your house.

Reduce condensation and humidity in the kitchen by covering pans when cooking and using an extractor fan. Avoid drying clothes indoors, unless using driers, which are vented outdoors.


Try turning the heating down a few

you have, where dust is allowed to accumulate, the more likely there is to be an allergic reaction. Where you can, put your things away in cabinets, drawers or cupboards. Regularly clean surfaces with a damp cloth, and wipe down window blinds, too.

Ordinary vacuum-cleaners pump out dust and allergens back into the air. You might consider buying a HEPA filtered vacuum-cleaner for use on floors and carpets, but check first whether it can be used on mattresses without adding to the dust.

Even tests on microporous mattress and pillow-covers show a significant build-up of dust-mite contamination. It is recommended that bed-covers should be washed weekly.

Unfortunately, the mattress inside one of these covers may act like an incubator, allowing mould, fungus and bacteria to increase. If you want to use a cover, first have your mattress properly cleaned and sprayed.

If you have asthma, rhinitis or eczema, you are advised to be tested for an allergy to dust mites. After all, there is no point in going overboard on mite-control if you do *not* have an allergy to dust mites. 

● If you would like to find out more about dust mites, visit the website of the Asthma and Allergy Information and Research (AAIR), of the Midlands Asthma and Allergy Research Association, a registered charity (www.users.globalnet.co.uk-aaair).