Health Problems Related to Insects, Dust Mites, and Rodents in Your Home

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A CLEAN HOUSE HELPS REDUCE PESTS

A clean house also helps to control pests like rats and mice. They need places to hide and make nests. Keeping your home free of clutter deprives pests of these hiding places and discourages them from coming into and staying in your home. Washing dirty dishes and wiping kitchen work surfaces after each meal helps deprive pests of food. If pests don’t find food in your home, they will not stay.

General cleaning tips and information:
The Kitchen:

- Make cleanup a habit and perform cleaning chores regularly. The list below gives suggestions on how often to clean various items in your kitchen:

Every Day:
- Wash dishes
- Wipe kitchen work surfaces (countertops, cook-tops, sinks)
- Sweep kitchen floor
- Empty Trash

Once a week:
- Check refrigerator and throw out spoiled food
- Mop floor
- Scrub kitchen sink
- Disinfect kitchen cleaning sponges
- Wash and rinse kitchen trash can

Every Three to Six Months depending on condition of surfaces:
- Wash face of kitchen cabinets
- Thoroughly clean refrigerator and microwave oven

At least once annually, more if needed:
- Clean out and wash cupboards
- Wash walls and woodwork
- Wash curtains
- Clean oven

HOME PEST BE GONE

Household pests like insects and rodents sometimes find their way into our homes. Common insect pests are cockroaches, flies and fleas. Recently bedbugs have been finding their way into more and more homes. Mice and rats are the most common rodents that invade our homes. If uncontrolled these pests can threaten our health.
Use Integrated Pest Management (IPM) to control pests

Integrated pest management (IPM) is a method for controlling pests that focuses on learning about pest behavior and their preferred environments. Once this information is obtained it can be used to eliminate the conditions that attract pests to your home. One of the primary goals of IPM is to eliminate pests as safely as possible. This means using chemical pesticides only as a last resort. There are three basic steps to safely eliminating pests with IPM methods:

- Find out exactly what pests are in your home and try to find out where they are coming from.
- All pests need food, water, and shelter. Eliminate those basic requirements and you also often eliminate the pest problem.
- If you cannot eliminate the pest problem with the above environmental controls, then use the least toxic method for eliminating the pests.
  - Start by using traps and bait first. The bait should be in a container designed to allow entry of only the pest you are targeting.
  - If you must use pesticides, read and follow directions on the label, and do so with extreme care.

INSECTS

Cockroaches

Exposure to both cockroaches and rodents is a severe health risk to people, and especially children, who have asthma. Cockroach allergens are strong asthma triggers. Cockroach allergens are small pieces of cockroach bodies and feces. These allergens get mixed in with household dust; and whenever that dust is disturbed, allergens get launched into the air where they can be inhaled and cause an allergic reaction. Most people will have some type of allergic reaction when exposed to household dust that contains cockroach allergens, and for people that have asthma this can cause an attack. Asthma attacks can be life threatening. Cockroaches create additional health problems because they live and crawl in filthy places so they often spread bacteria wherever they go.

Keeping your home clean and dry are two methods that will help prevent dust mites and cockroaches from coming into your home.

Bedbugs

Bedbugs are small insects that feed on the blood of warm blooded animals. Adult bedbugs are about ¼-inch in length. Bedbugs are not known to transmit infectious disease; however their bite causes an allergic reaction at the site of the bite. Bedbug bites look and feel similar to flea bites. Bedbugs have no wings. They typically get into homes as stowaways on luggage, clothing, bedding, mattresses, boxes, and other items that are moved between homes, apartments, and hotels. Used furniture, especially bed frames and mattresses, are most likely to harbor bedbugs or their eggs. Bedbugs can live many months without eating so they often hide in the cracks and crevices of vacant apartments until people move in. Then they invade the bed during night hours, bite and drink a few drops of blood before again retreating to their hiding place in the wall or floor.

Flies

House flies can spread diseases like food poisoning and dysentery. Flies usually feed and lay their eggs on garbage, manure, or carrion. So, when they get into homes they contaminate food preparation areas and food they land on. Also, when flies feed they regurgitate their stomach contents onto the food source to liquefy it and make it easier to eat. Of course, this contaminates any food they land on in your home with the contents of any filthy items they were eating prior to entering your home. They also defecate on food preparation surfaces they land on, further increasing the threat of bacterial contamination.
Keeping doors and windows closed, or protected by screens is a good method for keeping flies out of the home. Good sanitation practices in and around your home will also help to keep flies out.

**Fleas**
Fleas are tiny insects that feed on the blood of household pets and humans. They transmit disease and parasites with their bite. Their bite is also painful and extremely itchy. They often get into homes via household pets.

**Dust Mites**
Dust mites are very tiny and invisible to the human eye. They live in bedding, mattresses, carpeting and upholstered furniture in our homes and eat tiny pieces of organic material, primarily pieces of shed human skin cells. It is not the dust mites themselves that people are allergic to, but a protein in their fecal pellets. Dust mite fecal pellets are extremely strong asthma triggers. And constant exposure to this dust mite allergen can cause people to develop an allergy to dust mites and may even cause some people to develop asthma. House dust mite numbers can easily be controlled with good house cleaning practices.

**Mice and Rats**
Mice and rats, and the parasites they carry can transmit many diseases to humans. Some of those diseases are Histoplasmosis, Hantavirus, Plague, Salmonellosis, Leptospiros, Murine Typhus, and Rat-Bite Fever.

Resources used to compile the information was obtained from the National Healthy Home Partnership at the links listed below.

http://www.extensionhealthyhomes.org/lessons.html

http://www.extensionhealthyhomes.org/ccontent.html#pestfreeindex

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