



**Stop dust from taking flight a second time by using a damp or oiled rag when you're dusting.**



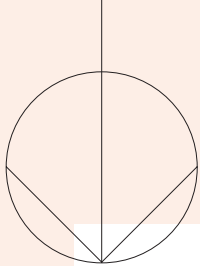
# CLEAR THE AIR

A room-by-room guide to stomping out allergens so your family can stop sneezing and itching and breathe a bit easier.

By Barbara Brody

It's not just  
flowers you have  
to watch out for.  
Indoor plants  
can collect mold  
and dust that  
impact you too.





**YOU'RE NOT IMAGINING IT:** Pollen allergy season is worse every year. (Tough break for itchy eyes and runny noses everywhere.) You can largely blame climate change for this unfortunate trend. Hotter temps translate to more potent pollen for a longer period of time. To make things worse, your teen's allergies may be flaring for the first time (or more than usual) thanks to hormonal changes. While there isn't much you can do to control the weather or your child's raging hormones—to be honest, the former seems a lighter lift than the latter—you *can* manage your indoor environment. "The first line of treatment for allergies is avoidance," says Tania Elliott, MD, a spokesperson for the American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology (ACAAI). Start by seeing an allergist to identify your triggers—pollen, dust mites, your son's rescue kitten. Then make some simple but powerful changes for an allergy-proof home.

## ENTRYWAY

### WIPE YOUR FEET

"Pollens are microscopic particles that get stuck in your eyes, nose and hair, and on your clothing," says Amy Shah, MD, a board-certified allergist and immunologist and internal medicine physician in Phoenix, AZ. A pair of doormats—one outside and another right inside—will limit the number of outdoor allergens that make it beyond the threshold.

For the outdoor mat, coir (made from coconut husks) is a good pick because it's water resistant, so it won't get musty, says professional organizer and certified house cleaning technician Donna Smallin Kuper. The indoor mat should be easy to pick up and shake outside, though it's still smart to vacuum this area often; every day is not overkill when allergies are at full force. For bonus points, keep a boot brush (like the adorable Esschert Design Owl Boot Brush; [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com), \$42) on your doorstep to help get extra gunk off muddy boots and sneakers.



**Ideally, anyone with allergies who's been outdoors for a while should head straight to the shower after coming inside. If that sounds too laborious or you don't have time, just be sure to wash your face and eyelids (eyelashes catch a lot of pollen) with a mild, fragrance-free cleanser, Shah says.**

### SHED YOUR LAYERS

**To avoid dragging pollen through your house, shed as much clothing as you can as soon as you come inside. Leave jackets, scarves, hats and more behind in your entryway or a closet. For those times when your kid's been playing flag football or you've been working in the yard, keep a hamper nearby—perhaps hidden in your coat closet—so you can isolate dirty duds until it's time to do laundry. (Remember to wash clothing on hot to kill allergens.)**

### MOST LIKELY TO MAKE YOU SNEEZE, ITCH & WHEEZE



#### POLLEN

A powdery substance from trees, grasses, flowers and weeds.

Ragweed, birch, sagebrush, cedar and oak are some of the most common pollen allergens.



#### DUST MITES

Microscopic critters that live in pillows, mattresses, carpet and upholstery.



#### MOLD

A fungus that lives on logs, in leaves and in damp places like your basement and bathroom.



#### PETS

Proteins found in the dander, saliva and urine of dogs and cats are common triggers.



#### FOOD

Milk, eggs, peanuts, tree nuts, soy, wheat, fish and shellfish are the most frequent offenders.



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## LOSE THE SHOES

Use your entryway or a closet to leave behind sneakers, shoes and boots that can track in allergens. If you hate seeing a messy pile of cast-off shoes, keep them in a slim organizer like the 12-Pair Shoe Storage Cabinet ([jossandmain.com](http://jossandmain.com), \$145) or keep it simple with a repurposed bench.



# FAMILY

## GO LOW

If you love rugs, opt for short-pile and no-pile styles. Think short-weaves made from polypropylene or sisal. Thick, fluffy rugs trap allergens like dust mites, pet dander and outdoor pollen that have managed to sneak past the duo-doormat setup. Wood and tile are ideal floorings for allergy sufferers. With the exception of cigarette smoke, “mold is the main problem indoors for many folks,” says David Corry, MD, professor of medicine in the section of immunology, allergy and rheumatology at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston. “Even if you’re not allergic to mold, it can get into your airways, start growing and increase the risk of developing allergies, asthma and chronic sinusitis.”

When you’re in the market for some new area rugs, consider splurging on wool: It’s more resistant to mold than synthetics, Corry says, but it also tends to be pricey. On a budget? Ruggable sells a variety of thin, machine-washable “rug covers” that latch onto matching pads ([ruggable.com](http://ruggable.com), from \$99).

No matter what covers your floor, remember to vacuum regularly—and thoroughly. “Most people don’t realize that the ‘push’ pass is a positioning move and the ‘pull’ pass is the one that actually does the cleaning job!” Kuper says. “So slow down on the pull.” If you have wall-to-wall carpeting, you’ll need to get it deep-cleaned (think steam cleaning or dry cleaning) on a regular basis if you’re serious about nixing dust mites, she adds. A service like Stanley Steamer ([stanleysteamer.com](http://stanleysteamer.com)) can handle the job.

## STAY DRY

If your family room feels damp or smells musty, that’s a red flag that mold could be growing—and, consequently, dust mites are proliferating. Buy an inexpensive hygrometer, which measures humidity, at your local hardware store or on Amazon and make sure the humidity stays below 60%, Corry says. If it’s above that, consider adding a dehumidifier to your shopping cart.

## COVER UP

Like carpet, fabric upholstery is a magnet for allergens. If your symptoms are bad and you can afford to redecorate, go for leather or faux leather. (Pollen, dust and dander should wipe right off.) Otherwise, cover your sofa with a machine-washable slipcover and launder it (along with throws and pillow covers) weekly. One stylish option that won’t remind you of your grandma’s plastic covers: The Brenna Box Cushion Sofa Slipcover ([wayfair.com](http://wayfair.com), \$130), which comes in four colors.

ALLERGIES  
TOTALLY SUCK.  
SO DOES THE  
RIGHT VACUUM.



**When looking for a new vacuum cleaner, the most important feature—especially for allergy sufferers—is HEPA filtration, which traps even the tiniest particles. A cyclonic vacuum, which spins dirt away, is also a good choice, according to the ACAAI.**



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### Shark Navigator Lift-Away NV352

Retailers nationwide, \$150  
Lightweight, long-lasting and a steal at this price point.



②

### Kenmore Elite Pet-Friendly 31150

Amazon.com, \$350  
Comes with an attachment that makes sucking up pet hair and dander a breeze. Works well on bare floors and carpeted areas.



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### Miele Complete C3 Marin

Amazon.com, \$1,100  
A favorite among professional testers, it automatically increases and decreases suction depending on the surface.



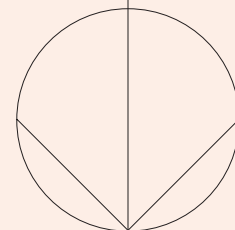
# ROOM



## DON'T GO TOO GREEN

Most indoor plants don't contain the type of pollen that plagues seasonal allergy sufferers, and they may even help clean the air by absorbing volatile organic compounds (VOCs), lab studies show. That said, plants *can* promote mold growth and collect dust. (Remember that time your kid wrote "Hi, Mom!" in the dust on a leaf of your fiddle leaf fig tree?) Occasionally, Elliot says, there can also be cross-reactivity between indoor plants and common outdoor allergens—meaning they might share similar proteins that can end up making you sneeze. If you're determined to bring some greenery indoors, you'll need to experiment to see what works for you.

PHOTO: LISA DIEDERICH PHOTOGRAPHY



## KITCHEN CONCERNS

### WATCH FOR WEIRD SYMPTOMS

The most common food allergy among adults is oral allergy syndrome, in which your throat can get itchy and your tongue or lips get swollen. It occurs when you eat something that contains proteins that are similar to those found in pollen. If you're allergic to pollen from birch trees, watch out for peaches, plums, apples and pears. Does ragweed pollen make you sneeze? Melons might bother you too.

Although oral allergy symptoms aren't usually serious, if you ignore the warning signs and keep eating the problematic food, your throat could close up. The good news, Shah says, is that the proteins that trigger an allergic reaction get changed by heat. So if you can't handle a fresh peach, peach cobbler should be just fine.

# BEDROOMS

## DITCH THE DUST

Getting rid of all the dust in your bedroom is impossible, but you can get pretty close. Start by ditching decorative throw pillows and fabric curtains (since most are not washable) and then picking up some dust-mite-proof encasements for your mattress and pillows. Many companies, including BedCare by National Allergy (available at Bed Bath & Beyond), make a variety of protectors in different sizes. Remember to wash your bedding once a week on the hottest setting. “When dusting, always go from top to bottom, because that’s how the dust settles,” says Leah Segedie, author of *Green Enough: Eat Better, Live Cleaner, Be Happier (All Without Driving Your Family Crazy!)*. “So start with the ceiling fan and finish with the floors.”

## RUN THE AC

Cool spring air feels nice on your skin, but if you have seasonal allergies, all you’re doing is letting pollen inside. You’re much better off keeping things sealed off in the bedroom, where you spend so much time, and turning on the air conditioner, Elliott says. Just remember to change or clean the filters regularly: about once a month if you have a window unit and every three months if you have central air.



## CONSIDER AN AIR PURIFIER

Keeping windows closed, running the AC and (stay strong!) banning pets from the bedroom should help, but if you’re still waking up congested, it may be time to take things to the next level with an air purifier. (If you’re allergic to dust mites, using a dehumidifier to keep the bedroom’s humidity below 60% also helps.) “Air purifiers are often noisy, so I tell people to run them when they’re not in the room sleeping,” says Corry. “In the morning, when you leave the room, turn it on and close the door behind you.”

## HOW TO CHOOSE AN AIR PURIFIER



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### Check the CADR Rating

The higher the Clean Air Delivery Rate (CADR), the faster the unit filters air. The Bissell air400 has a CADR of 279 for smoke, so it reduces smoke particles and introduces 300 cubic feet of “clean” air each minute. *Amazon.com*, \$399



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### Choose your technology

A HEPA filter is the gold standard, because it’s been around since the ‘50s and has been shown to trap teeny allergens. Try the GermGuardian Room HEPA Air Purifier with Sanitizer and Odor Reduction. *Wayfair.com*, \$119



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### Pay attention to room size

Make sure the product can handle the room you plan to use it in. This slick-looking Coway AP-1512HH Mighty Air Purifier works for rooms up to 360 square feet. *Amazon.com*, \$225

# BATHROOMS

## AIR IT OUT

“Being warm and wet makes the bathroom the main place that dust mites and mold grow,” Shah says. Wash towels at least once a week and crack a window or turn on an exhaust fan every time you shower. (Try the Delta Breez Slim Series 50 CFM Wall or Ceiling Bathroom Exhaust Fan; [homedepot.com](http://homedepot.com), \$42). Exhaust fans are designed to pull moisture out of the air and can get dirty, so consider having a professional come in to clean and maintain the system annually.



**Sensitive to scents? Use fragrance-free products, not unscented ones, which may mask odors with chemicals.**

## MAKE IT SPARKLE

Bleach is best for beating mold, but it can also be irritating to skin and airways. If you're sensitive, try a botanical or mineral-based disinfectant that contains hydrogen peroxide or thyme oil, says Segedie, who blogs at [mamavation.com](http://mamavation.com). She's a fan of household cleaners from Dr. Bronner's and BioKleen. Just keep in mind that allergies and sensitivities are highly personal, so you might need to do some experimenting to figure out what works for you. “There are a lot of natural oils that can cause an allergic reaction in some people,” Elliott says.



## PULL THE CURTAIN

Shower curtains tend to accumulate mold, but that's only part of the problem. Even after the first month you have them up, PVC shower curtains can off-gas chemicals like phthalates and VOCs that may trigger allergies and asthma. If you can't install a glass shower door, which is easier to keep clean, consider a curtain made with PEVA, which functions like vinyl but with no off-gassing. “Wipe it with a damp cloth sprayed with a solution including hydrogen peroxide or thyme oil to kill bacteria and mold,” says Segedie. One catch: PEVA is made from petrochemicals, so “it's not the greenest option,” she adds.

A better, more environmentally friendly choice is a shower curtain made from hemp, cotton, linen or recycled sailcloth. Pull it closed (unbunched) after use to help it air dry, and wash it at least monthly.

## FRESHEN UP WISELY

Aerosol sprays quickly cover up icky bathroom odors, but beware: They put fine particulate matter into the air, which you inhale. If you're sensitive to fragrance, you're better off cracking a window to air out the room. “If you're not sensitive to essential oils, those are a better option,” says Shah. “Lavender and peppermint are usually OK for most people.” Add a drop or two to a diffuser, or put a dab on the inside of the toilet paper roll. One to try is Purify Essential Oil Blend ([rockymountainoils.com](http://rockymountainoils.com), \$20), which contains lemongrass, tea tree, rosemary, lavender, myrtle and citronella oils.