



## Asthma, Allergy and Spring

### Be Prepared!

With the onset of spring's warmer weather and longer brighter days, it is tempting to throw open windows and doors, to spring clean the house and to tidy up the garden. However, for people with asthma and allergies, spring can be a time of sneezing, runny noses and asthma attacks.

Asthma can be triggered by many things such as dust mites, mould, pets, exercise, cold air and viral infections as well as pollens. About half of people with asthma who have a skin prick allergy test, will test positive to grasses and pollens. Many people with asthma find that their symptoms are more trouble-some during certain times of the year; in particular, this commonly occurs when pollen from various plants is present in the air.

Seasonal hay fever affects up to two million Australians. Other people can have allergic reactions in the form of rashes, contact dermatitis and hives. It is important to identify the triggers for each person. It is recommended that if you have allergy symptoms, you should consult your doctor.

### Common spring triggers

People with asthma have trigger factors. As part of a person's asthma management plan, it is important to identify and avoid contact with known trigger factors.

### Allergen avoidance in the garden

- Choose bird or insect pollinated plants rather than wind-pollinated plants
- Avoid being in the garden on hot still days and very windy days
- Choose a low pollen producing grass such as buffalo grass or 'Greenless Park' couch
- Reduce weeds by using inorganic mulch such as pebbles and gravel and plant low maintenance ground cover plants
- Choose lightly scented plants
- Avoid compost heaps. If you do have a compost heap, ensure it has a lid
- See your doctor to discuss allergy testing/nasal sprays

### Allergen avoidance in the home

Creating a low allergen home incorporates features which will reduce those triggers that may cause asthma. This will help reduce the dust mite population and the incidence of other allergens in the home.



# Respiratory Care WA

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## Construction

- **Ventilation:** it is important to ensure adequate ventilation in the home and this equates to an air change every hour. Unless windows have been completely sealed most homes provide this amount of ventilation.
- **Windows and Doors:** large windows and doors that are positioned to allow good cross ventilation when they are opened are preferred. Direct sunlight will increase the surface temperatures of any floor coverings and furnishings which will then reduce the relative humidity and effectively reduce the number of any dust mites.
- **Flooring:** choose materials which are easy to wash and clean, reducing the risk of dust mites.
- **Air Conditioning:** points to consider include circulation of fresh filtered air rather than re-circulated air within the house and removal of dust, pollen and other foreign matters through effective filters. All systems should be serviced regularly to maintain efficiency.
- **Insulation:** insulated areas should be completely sealed to ensure that no airborne particles, which could cause irritation to people with asthma and allergies, get into the house.
- **Vacuum Cleaners:** a ducted central vacuum with external dust collection points is ideal, as it does not release the dust into the home.
- **Furnishings:** should be selected with the intention of reducing dust and the opportunity for dust mites to live and breed.
- **Floor Coverings:** scatter rugs, which can be hung out in the sunlight and beaten to remove dust mites and allergens, are ideal. If carpet is laid, it is preferable to use short pile carpets, as they are easier to clean than the twist or loop pile. Synthetics have lower moisture content than wool making them less conducive to dust mite growth. Steam cleaning is a preferred cleaning method, as the temperature of the steam will help reduce the dust mites. However, rapid drying is vital to minimise any mould growth.
- **Window Coverings:** external blinds and shutters are preferred to drapes. Vertical and roller blinds are also suitable.
- **Bedding:** the warmth and moisture here provide ideal conditions for the dust mite. The nutrients in skin flakes, and proteins such as feathers and wool in pillows, quilts, and blankets also provide conditions for mites to thrive. Encasing the mattress and pillows in protectors may stop the transfer of dust mites.
- **Removing dust mites from bedding:** hot wash (greater than 55°C) bedding, sheets, pillowcases and quilts, in soapy water at least once every two weeks.

Further information on allergies, anaphylaxis, hay fever and eczema can be found at [www.allergy.org.au](http://www.allergy.org.au)