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Make Your Home Healthier

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As tree and grass pollen waft through the air in the spring, summer and fall, allergies may cause you to retreat from outside. However, for many allergy sufferers, pollen is actually just one part of a three-pronged attack. The other two culprits, mold and dust, silently lie and wait for you inside your home. Pollen-induced allergies can be worse in the spring and fall, but allergies to mold and dust are year-round plagues. While you can't do anything to control the pollen outside, you can take several steps to reduce allergy triggers in your home. Here are a number of tips to help you sneeze less and enjoy your home more. Lowe's is happy to provide this information as a service to you.

Heating and Cooling Your House

- Make sure to clean or replace the filters in your house monthly. HEPA filters are the most effective in removing dust particles from the air. If you have a window unit, don't forget that its filter also needs regular cleaning.
- Use cheesecloth or disposable vent covers to trap dust.
- Consider having your ducts cleaned professionally.
- If you have a wood-burning stove, store all firewood outside because wood can collect mold.

Cleaning Your House

- Vacuum at least two times a week. Invest in a vacuum cleaner with a HEPA filter and maximum allergen filtration. Otherwise you'll simply stir up dust in the room.
- Don't forget to vacuum upholstered furniture.
- Try to deep clean your carpet every few months. However, make sure the carpet dries quickly so that mold doesn't begin to grow inside it.
- Frequently move and dust behind and around heat-generating items like televisions, stereos, VCRs, and computers.
- Dust with a damp cloth or a specially-designed magnetically-charged dust cloth to keep dust from flying upward. Avoid feather dusters since the dust tends to simply resettle on other surfaces.
- When cleaning or vacuuming, wear a dust mask.

Reducing Dust and Pollen Inside Your House

- Build a mud room if you don't already have one. Every family member can leave wet or dusty shoes or boots there without tracking dust, pollen or mold into the main living area.
- Choose window treatments that are easy to clean and collect little dust. Roll-up blinds, shades or short, lightweight, washable curtains are better choices than heavy drapes. Wash curtains every month or two.
- Instead of hanging clothes outdoors where they collect pollen, use your clothes dryer. Make sure to vent your clothes dryer to the outside. Ideally your washer and dryer should be in an enclosed room.
- Dust mites, the microscopic creatures that produce dust, love carpet, so use hardwood, laminate, or vinyl flooring wherever you can. You can accent the floor with washable throw rugs. If you want to use carpet, choose a low-pile instead of a higher-pile carpet.
- Check to make sure your windows and doors fit tightly to prevent outside air from filtering into your home. If the doors and windows aren't snug, you may need to replace them with newer, more efficient units, or you may simply need to caulk and weather-strip again.



Pollen

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- Keep your house's décor simple and easy-to-clean. Store collections of small items behind a glassed-in curio cabinet to cut down on the amount of dust these items can gather.
- Because fabric wall hangings collect so much dust, consider replacing them.
- Did you know that pets kept primarily indoors will carry less allergens and dust on them than those kept outdoors? However, if you have indoor/outdoor pets:
 - limit pet access in the home to rooms with hard-surfaced floors.
 - bathe your pets once a week to reduce dander.
 - use an allergen-reducing topical product on your pet's coat.
- You may want to invest in a room air cleaner with a HEPA filter.
- Make sure to dust or vacuum around ceiling fan blades. Usually they are coated with dust.
- Don't leave the car idling in the garage. Doing so allows carbon monoxide fumes to build up in your garage and eventually filter into your home.
- Install a carbon monoxide detector if you haven't already.

Controlling the Humidity of Your Home

- Make sure you treat your basement with the proper paints to waterproof it and reduce mold growth.
- Keep the humidity in your house and basement below 50 percent. If a humidity gauge isn't already built in your heating and cooling system, invest in a humidity gauge or hygrometer. To keep humidity under control, you may need to use a dehumidifier, especially in the basement.



Tips for the Kitchen and Bath

- Clean the refrigerator frequently, as mold grows quickly there. Wipe it down with bleach, and throw out old food. Also make sure to clean around the refrigerator base because it attracts a large amount of dust.
- To reduce mold and odors, run the exhaust fans whenever you're cooking or bathing. Leave fans on for twenty minutes afterwards.
- Clean the countertops in kitchens and the fixtures in bathrooms with bleach or other household disinfectants. Don't forget to wipe down garbage cans and other humid areas with bleach.
- A dirty clothes hamper in the bathroom can collect mold. Take dirty clothes directly to the laundry room.

Tips For The Bedroom

It's especially important to make sure your bedroom is allergen free — after all you spend around one-third of your life there. If you are waking up with a runny nose and itchy throat, then dust mites in your bedroom may be the problem.

- Dust mites thrive in the warm environments of mattresses and pillows. Encase your pillows and mattresses with allergen-proof covers. Also choose washable pillows and comforters made from synthetic materials, avoiding ones made of down or feathers. Replace pillows every two years.



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- Wash sheets weekly in hot water and blankets at least every two weeks. To kill dust mites, the water in your washing machine should be 130 degrees or higher. Remember, however, that the National Safety Council recommends that you keep your water heater at 120 degrees. If you choose to set the heater heater to 130° F, it is strongly recommended that you install faucets and shower heads with built-in anti-scald and temperature regulating devices, especially if you live with young children or elderly adults.
- Keep clutter off the floor of your closet so that you can mop or vacuum it.
- Wash the walls and ceilings in this room frequently, and make sure the decor is simple and easy-to-clean.
- Store books or collectibles in other rooms. If you need to keep CDs, tapes, stereos, televisions, or stuffed animals in the bedroom, put them in drawers or closed cabinets.
- Stuffed toys in children's bedrooms can be sterilized by putting them in the freezer at frequent intervals. Dust mites can survive in cold areas for quite a while, so this method may not kill the existing dust mites, but it'll prevent them from reproducing