

Winter Allergies:

What to Watch for and How to Manage



By winter, most outdoor allergens lie dormant. As a result, cold weather brings relief to many gardeners with hay fever. But some individuals may have allergic reactions from the pollen of trees in the Juniper family. These trees pollinate in the wintery months of December, January, and February.

But winter means that more of us are spending time indoors. So, if you are prone to seasonal allergies, you may also react to indoor allergens, such as mold, pet dander, dust mites, or cockroaches.

Some common indoor allergy triggers are:

- **Dust Mites:** Microscopic bugs flourish in mattresses and bedding. When their droppings and remains become airborne, they can cause allergy symptoms.
- **Mold:** This fungus thrives in damp, humid areas such as basements and bathrooms. When mold spores get into the air, they can trigger allergy symptoms.
- **Animals:** Most people are not allergic to animal fur but, rather, to a protein found in the pet dander, saliva, and urine.



{Dust Mite}



{Mold}



{Animals}

Allergy symptoms caused by dust, pollen, or mold include:

- Coughing
- Dark circles under the eyes
- Itchy eyes and nose
- Runny nose
- Sneezing
- Watery eyes

Treatments for winter allergies include:

- **Antihistamines:** Reduces sneezing, sniffling, and itching
- **Decongestants:** Clears mucus to relieve congestion and swelling
- **Immunotherapy** (allergy shots or under-the-tongue tablets): Exposes your body to gradually bigger doses of the allergen. This approach can curb your symptoms for a longer period than allergy drugs.

There are some things you can do to cut down on allergy triggers, such as:

- ✓ Change the filter on your home's furnace regularly. A properly functioning filter can trap allergens and thus reducing your exposure.
- ✓ Vacuum often, preferably with a device that has a HEPA filter, to contain the allergens as you clear them away. Wall-to-wall carpeting can harbor allergy-inducing debris. So, if it's in the budget, consider changing to hard-surface flooring.
- ✓ Try to reduce humidity and moisture levels inside the house as they can foster mold growth. Ensure that bathroom fans are working to clear steam. Keep your indoor humidity level between 30–40% with the help of a humidifier or dehumidifier. This will help prevent the growth of mold and mites.
- ✓ Improve bedroom air quality by investing in dust-reducing covers for pillows and mattresses. Launder bedding often, preferably at least once a week.
- ✓ Wash your hands frequently, especially after playing with the family pet. This will reduce exposure to pet allergens and, when returning from public places, to decease transmission of common winter viruses.

Sources:

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