

How to Sleep with Allergies

Whether you have seasonal allergies or a more chronic case, learn how you can improve your sleep.

The sniffing, sneezing misery of allergies can affect nearly every aspect of our lives, from getting our work done to simply going for a walk. So it makes sense that allergies affect our sleep as well.

Did you know that [one-third of allergy sufferers](#) say that their sleep is compromised due to their allergy symptoms?

It's true; thanks to allergy symptoms, millions of people struggle to fall asleep, stay asleep, and sleep soundly. If you have seasonal allergies, it might not seem like such a big deal to lose some sleep for a few weeks once per year, but many people actually have year-round allergies that get worse in the spring.

Household allergens like dust, pet dander, and mold can negatively affect your sleep all year long. If you aren't getting the high-quality sleep you want (and that your body needs), take some time to consider whether your allergies could be to blame.

Why Do Allergies Make it Hard to Sleep?

Studies show that [people with allergies report higher levels of insomnia](#), more difficulty falling asleep, and higher instances of feeling like they aren't getting enough sleep in general than those without allergies. But why is that?

Basically, it's hard to sleep when you don't feel well. And allergies have a nasty habit of making us feel pretty miserable.

When you are exposed to an allergen, it enters your airways and causes irritation. This can lead to congestion, watering eyes, coughing, sneezing, headache, sore throat, and more. All of these things can make us very uncomfortable, making it hard to relax enough to fall asleep.

Plus, when we lie flat, all that congestion rushes to our heads, making things even worse. It's really no wonder allergies have such an effect on our sleep.

Allergens that Affect Sleep

The most common culprits for allergens that disrupt our sleep include:

- [Dust mites](#)
- Pollen
- Pet Dander
- Mold

Dust mites

Dust is largely made up of dead skin cells, and dust mites are the tiny creatures who feed on those dead skin cells. These mites cause an allergic reaction, and since they're around all year, they can cause allergy symptoms in every season.

Pollen

Pollen is one of the most well-known seasonal allergens, since more pollen is typically released in the spring when plants are flowering.

Pet dander

Another year-round allergen that may affect your sleep is pet dander. Pet dander is basically dead skin cells from your pets, and just like dust, they can enter our airways and cause irritation and allergic reactions.

Mold

Mold is a particularly harmful allergen that typically grows in damp environments. It can grow in soft furnishings, under the carpet, or even in the walls.

Sleep Problems for People with Allergic Rhinitis

Allergic rhinitis is also commonly called hay fever, and common symptoms include runny nose, itchy, watery eyes, sneezing, and more. If you suffer from allergic rhinitis, you may struggle with insomnia and issues sleeping in general, but allergic rhinitis also puts you at risk for two specific sleep problems: obstructive sleep apnea and snoring.

Obstructive sleep apnea (OSA)

[Obstructive sleep apnea](#) (OSA) is a sleep disorder where breathing stops periodically throughout the night. This is due to the muscles in the throat relaxing too much and

blocking the airway. OSA can result in severe daytime sleepiness, but it is also associated with increased risk of more serious chronic conditions, like heart disease and stroke. Allergies can cause or worsen OSA because nasal congestion narrows the airway.

Snoring

The same issues that cause OSA can also lead to increased [snoring](#), which is not ideal for you or anyone who may sleep with you. A narrowed airway caused by allergic rhinitis increases the likelihood of snoring, which may cause you to wake up throughout the night, or to wake up your partner, disrupting a healthy night's sleep.

How to Sleep Better with Allergies

If you have allergies and have noticed their effects on your sleep, don't worry. There are ways to sleep better with allergies. Based on the current research, we've found several strategies for getting a good night's rest, no matter how bad your allergies get.

Shower Before Bed

One way to help reduce allergy-induced sleep problems is to shower before bed rather than in the morning. When you shower, you'll clean away dust mites, pollen, and other potential allergens that may have collected on your skin or in your hair throughout the day.

Without that nighttime shower, those allergens remain on your body all night long and may increase nasal congestion as you sleep, hurting your sleep quality.

Adjust Your Sleeping Position

Everyone with allergies knows that awful feeling when you lie flat on your back and feel all of the congestion rush to your head, causing a pounding headache and clogged airways that might keep you awake for hours.

One way to avoid this problem? Adjust your [sleeping position](#). It's easier said than done, since many of us are naturally drawn to specific sleeping positions, but there are orthopedic pillows that can help encourage you to sleep on your side, which can help prevent snoring and obstructive sleep apnea.

However, sleeping on your side may cause all of the congestion to run to one nostril, which can be equally uncomfortable. In that case, you may want to sleep propped up

slightly on nights when your allergies are particularly bad. You can pile a bunch of your own pillows to keep your head elevated slightly, or there are [orthopedic pillows](#) to help with that as well.

Keep Your Sinuses Clean

Do you know what's even better than trying to adjust your sleeping position to accommodate congested nasal passages? Preventing those passages from getting congested in the first place.

This isn't always possible of course, but there are ways you can try to reduce congestion, especially during peak allergy season.

- **Saline nasal flushes:** Also known as saline nasal irrigation, saline nasal flushes are used to clear out mucus and soothe irritated nasal passageways. They can help you breathe easier and prevent irritation from causing more congestion as you sleep.
- **Steroid nasal sprays:** Unlike nasal flushes, saline nasal sprays aren't designed to remove excess mucus. Instead, they focus on soothing irritation and reducing inflammation. This is an especially effective tool if you're looking to reduce allergy-induced snoring or OSA.
- **Antihistamines:** Antihistamines are a great option if you want to use medication. They can help stop the allergic reaction process in its tracks. Basically, when you have an allergic reaction, your body releases a chemical called histamines, which goes on to attack your body because it thinks the allergen is something far more dangerous than it actually is. This leads to inflammation, congestion, and all the other fun symptoms of allergies. Antihistamines counteract these histamines, preventing symptoms from getting too bad to begin with.
- **Nasal decongestant sprays:** Decongestant sprays are different from saline sprays because they can effectively shrink the blood vessels in the nose, which is an excellent way to reduce inflammation and irritation. Just be careful not to overuse these. Overuse can lead to something called the "[rebound effect](#)" which causes chronic congestion that requires steroid nose sprays to remedy.
- **Nasal decongestant oral medications:** Decongestant oral medications work just like decongestant sprays, by shrinking blood vessels in the nose, but because they're an oral medication, the rebound effect is much less likely.

How to Make your Bedroom Hypoallergenic

There are a few steps you can take to keep your bedroom allergen-free and get better sleep during allergy season and all year round.

1. Vacuum Often

One of the best ways you can reduce allergens in your bedroom to improve your sleep quality is by vacuuming often. The more you vacuum, the fewer allergens like dust mites and pet dander can build up on your flooring.

Unfortunately, the act of vacuuming may make your allergies worse because the vacuum can kick up dust and pet dander into the air instead of sucking it all up, so if you live with someone else who doesn't have allergies, you may want to ask them to do the vacuuming.

If you have carpeting and you notice that it always seems to be full of dust and pet dander, no matter how often you vacuum, it may be time to switch it out for tile, vinyl, or wood flooring instead. These types of flooring don't hold onto allergens as strongly, so they are more hypoallergenic.

2. Keep Your Windows Closed

If pollen is a big allergen for you, it can definitely help to keep your windows closed. This is especially important in the bedroom because if pollen floats in and lands on your pillow, you'll be pressing your face directly on it when you go to bed later. That is sure to cause some major allergy symptoms that might interrupt your sleep.

3. Filter the Air

If you don't already, you should definitely be using an air filter to help you cope with your allergies, and that filter should be replaced regularly. Some people are happy with replacing their filter once every three months, but many allergy sufferers need to replace the filter more often, like once a month.

You may also want to get a more efficient filter. High-efficiency particulate air filters (HEPA filters) are a great idea for those with allergies. They can remove approximately 99% of dust, mold, pollen, bacteria, and other particles from the air, making them a great choice for people with allergies.

4. Use a Dehumidifier

Dehumidifiers are another great way to keep the air in your home from worsening your allergies, especially if you live in an area known for mold. Dehumidifiers remove excess water from the air, which helps prevent mold growth that might irritate your allergies.

5. Keep Pets out of the Bedroom

Can't seem to get all of the pet dander out of the carpet when you vacuum? It may be a better idea to keep the pets out of your bedroom altogether. The pet dander can get into your carpet, but it can also get into your bedding, which in turn can get the pet dander in your hair. Then you carry around those allergens near your face all day long, causing more and more allergy symptoms.

6. Use Anti-Allergy Bedding (and Replace it Regularly)

One last way to ensure that your allergies don't interfere with your sleep is to use anti-allergy bedding. Below are the most important items to buy hypoallergenic and replace regularly.

[Hypoallergenic Mattress](#)

If you want to avoid making your allergies worse at night, the best way to do it is to sleep on a mattress that won't trap dust mites, pollen, and other allergens.

[Organic mattresses](#) that meet CertiPUR-US certifications are a great place to start. [Latex mattresses](#) are an especially great option for allergy sufferers because latex is naturally hypoallergenic and antimicrobial.

[Hypoallergenic Pillows](#)

It's also important that you get hypoallergenic pillows and/or pillow protectors to help protect you from nighttime allergic reactions. Even with a hypoallergenic pillow, you'll want to make sure to wash your pillow regularly and replace it once every year or so.

Hypoallergenic Bedding

To prevent your allergies from affecting your sleep, you'll also want to get hypoallergenic bedding. Consider [hypoallergenic mattress protectors](#) and [hypoallergenic sheets](#) for all your bedding needs. It's also recommended that you wash your bedding with hypoallergenic laundry detergent and fabric softener.

Sleeping with allergies can be challenging. Whether you're dealing with seasonal allergies or a chronic case of allergic rhinitis, your sleep shouldn't have to suffer.

By making some simple sleeping adjustments and making your bedroom hypoallergenic, you'll be on your way to better nights of rest in no time.

Sources

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