



5 TOTALLY BOGUS THINGS YOU ONLY THINK YOU KNOW ABOUT ALLERGIES

You sneeze when a cat walks by, wheeze through the spring and summer, and can't even get close to a Christmas tree. As one of the 60 million Americans who suffer from allergies, according to the Allergy and Asthma Association, you may think you're already aware of everything there is to know about allergies and the allergens that trigger them. You may actually "know" much less than you think.

Misconceptions about allergies and what causes an allergic attack are nearly as widespread as allergies themselves. Here are five common myths about allergy triggers and the facts behind them:

Myth No. 1: Allergies may go away on their own.

Fact: This may be correct. It's true that allergies can fluctuate with the season as allergens, like pollen or mold spores, wax and wane. And some food allergies seem to disappear as children grow older – with the exception of peanut and tree nut allergies, which largely continue into adulthood. But the underlying cause of any allergy is an over-reaction by a sensitive immune system that perceives the allergen as a threat. Over time, your immune system may grow accustomed to an allergen and no longer react as strongly. Or, some other type of allergen may emerge as a trigger. People can develop allergies later in life, even if they never had them as children or young adults.

Myth No. 2: Houseplants give off pollens that cause allergies.

Fact: Pollen is definitely an allergy trigger for many people. But the types of pollen that cause sneezing, coughing and itchy, watery eyes are typically from outdoor sources like trees, weeds and grass – not from indoor plants. In fact, an extensive study by NASA found that houseplants can actually improve indoor air quality. They act as natural air filters by removing carbon dioxide and contaminants, and emitting fresh, clean oxygen.

Myth No. 3: People with allergies shouldn't have carpeting in their homes.

Fact: Not one scientific study affirms a link between the increase of allergies and asthma and the widespread use of carpet in homes. In fact, several studies not only refute a correlation, they even seem to indicate carpet may actually be beneficial to allergy sufferers. A Swedish study found that when carpet use in that country declined by 70 percent, allergies in the general population increased by 30 percent. Another study, encompassing nearly 20,000 people in 18 different countries, found reduced asthma symptoms among people with carpeted bedrooms. Finally, a study of more than 4,600 New Jersey school children found that kids with moderate to severe asthma who had carpet in their bedrooms missed fewer school days and had less need for asthma medication.

"One explanation could be that carpet acts like a filter, trapping allergens and keeping them out of the air so they can be removed through proper cleaning," says Joe Yarbrough of the Carpet & Rug Institute (CRI). "Effectively cleaned carpet can maintain indoor air quality, making it a viable choice for families impacted by allergies and asthma."

Myth No. 4: All you need is a vacuum cleaner with a HEPA filter.

Fact: Actually, it's not just the HEPA filter that helps, it's how frequently and effectively you vacuum. In order to effectively remove allergens, a vacuum must not only be able to pick up allergens, but also keep them contained inside the bag or canister until you can safely dispose of the dirt. Vacuums that expel dust and other allergens through the exhaust are simply putting all those allergy triggers back into the air you breathe. The CRI tests vacuums for effectiveness and green qualities, and awards a Seal of Approval to those that meet its stringent testing standards. For a list of CRI-approved vacuums and to learn more about how to properly care for carpet, visit www.carpet-rug.org.

Myth No. 5: Dog/cat hair causes allergies.

Fact: If hair were the source of pet allergies, simply shaving your pet would eliminate your allergy trigger. In fact, allergies are triggered by proteins in oil gland secretions that get shed as dander, and proteins in saliva that get spread when a pet licks its fur, according to the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences. While cat dander is the most common pet-related allergy, dog dander and rodent urine can also be triggers. Getting rid of your pet won't rid your home of pet dander and hair; the National Institutes of Health reports that both are present in some level in virtually every American home. You can mitigate your exposure and reaction to pet allergens by keeping pets off your bed and washing their bedding weekly in hot water, using a prescription or over-the-counter allergy medication for symptoms, and regularly cleaning carpet with a CRI-approved vacuum.

Visit carpet-rug.org and www.criblog.org to learn more.

