

Dusting Tips for a Mold-Safe and Healthier Home

written by Catherine January 12, 2018



Dust is my nemesis. Dusting is the one household chore that I never ever feel like I can get on top of. I almost feel like as I am dusting, I am just watching new dust build up all over again. Does this happen to you?

(Note: *Studies show that the average six-room home in the United States collects 40 pounds of dust each year.*)

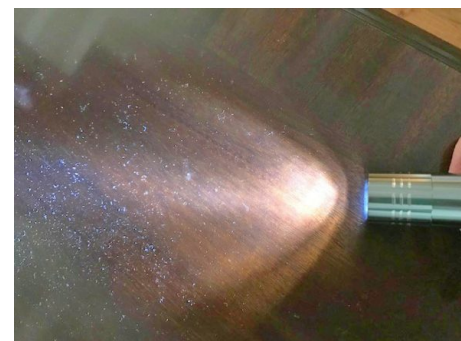
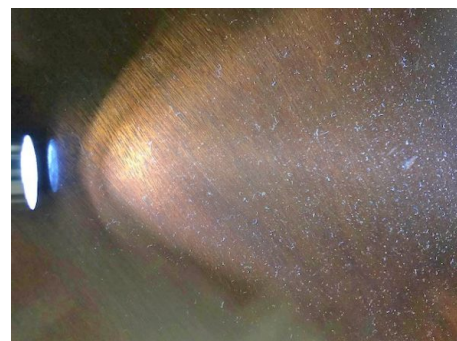
Well, don't give up on your dusting just yet. It is incredibly necessary and an incredibly powerful tool in your arsenal of preventing mold build-up and improving air quality in your home. As a matter of fact, regularly dusting and keeping dust levels low in your home can yield noticeable improvement in allergies, nighttime sleep, and overall health for everyone in your family, regardless of mold.

Now, a few facts on dust as it relates to mold:

Dust is not dirt, so no need to feel embarrassed that you have it or that it is an indication of poor housekeeping. House dust is a normal occurrence as fibers found in pillows, drapes, clothes, linens, and other furnishings at home, work, school, or even in your car, breakdown and disperse.

Just as plants produce seeds for reproduction, molds produce tiny spores. These spores are less than 4 microns in size – so small that as many as 250,000 spores can fit on the head of a pin. Mold spores attach to airborne dust particles. Then they can be transported just about anywhere and land just about on anything. That is why mold, once airborne, is so hard to get rid of, and also why mold spores are so easily inhaled by those who inhabit the spaces where they exist.

Many times, you have mold in your home and you mistake it for dust. Gravity will always pull dust to the top of a horizontal surface. If you ever find “dust” on the bottom of a surface, such as a shelf, you are looking at mold. This is a very common place to find mold in homes. Grab a flashlight; shine it on the bottom of a shelf. See anything? If there seems to be a blanket of “dust” on the underside of horizontal surfaces, it is in need of being removed.



As a matter of fact, shining a flashlight on your dresser, table or hard surface at night, so that the beam skims across the surface is a great way to see what kind of dust situation you have going on in the main rooms of your home. I often do this “flashlight test” as a very non-scientific way of identifying how quickly dust returns in our home. For example, if I dust in the morning in our bedroom, I will shine the flashlight across all surfaces that evening to make sure I did a good job. Then, I will continue to look with the flashlight for the next few nights in a row to see just how quickly the blanket of dust is returning. When I dust again, I will redo my experiment to see if I can go the same amount of time between dusting. I do this periodically, because it not only helps you get into the most effective dusting schedule for your home, but it also will help you to identify if your HVAC filters need changing or if you have air flow issues in particular rooms in your home—both of which contribute to your indoor dust levels.

Contaminated dust can most definitely create a health crisis. In an extreme scenario, and to illustrate the potential magnitude of contaminated dust, let’s consider Farmer’s Lung.

Farmer’s lung can occur when farmers move or work with hay, grain, or silage in which mold spores have grown. While working with these moldy materials, the dust from them gets stirred up and the farmers inhale large amounts of both dust particles and mold spores at high concentrations. In fact, a farmer can inhale up to 750,000 of these spores per minute. While the body has natural defense mechanisms (such as sneezing and coughing) that help prevent dust and other particles from entering the lungs, mold spores can often bypass these defenses because of their small size and overwhelming numbers. Once inside the body, the mold spores can take residence, enter the bloodstream or cross the blood/brain barrier and can cause extreme sickness—shortness of breath, chronic cough, fatigue, depression, weakness, the list goes on and sounds incredibly similar to the symptoms of sudden onset asthma and mold illness, doesn’t it?

While you are not going to get Farmer’s Lung from the dust in your home, you can inhale enough mold spores to where your health is affected—nasal congestion, asthma, sneezing, nighttime snoring, itchy watery eyes and other allergy symptoms. And, if those mold spores are from a hidden water-damaged area and are at particularly high levels and/or mycotoxin-producing, even a little dust that feeds that mold or helps it to get airborne is not something you want to just shrug off. The debilitating potential of mycotoxins for humans includes neurological problems, cancer, fungal infections, and in some cases death. Particularly concerning is that fact that most mycotoxin poisoning mimics other chronic illnesses, so the sick person is misdiagnosed, not properly treated, and many times, continues to get sick, because they are still living in the mold. (*Note: If you want to see how quickly mold spores can infect a home, read my previous post about my experience [HERE](#).)*

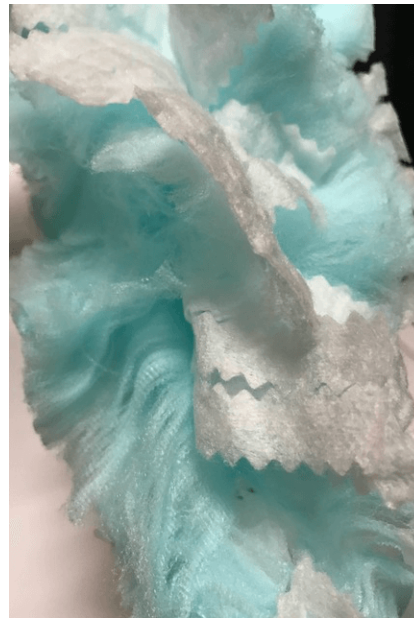
Don’t worry! I am not just going to leave you with that alarming information. I am going to show you how to combat the dust and, by doing so, how to keep “natural” mold levels to a minimum in your home. (*Note: I say, “natural,” because this is all advice for dust/mold maintenance. If you have water intrusion, leaks or major mold issues, simply keeping dust levels low will NOT mitigate the problem. For that, you will need the advice of a professional mold remediator.*)

My Tips and Tools for Keeping Dust Levels Low in Your Home:



1. **Vacuum 2 times per week.** Use a [household vacuum equipped with HEPA filtration](#). Vacuuming the dust physically removes it from your environment, which is why I think it is superior to dusting alone. I vacuum my floors, my rugs, and my upholstery; pretty much anything I can run the vacuum across. Most canister vacuums come with upholstery tools for this type of work. If you keep to a 2 times per week schedule, you will not have to dust anywhere near as much as you used to. Make sure to periodically move furniture

to vacuum underneath it. Lots of dust can congregate under beds, sofas, chairs, even under area rugs. Also, use your crevice attachment to vacuum along baseboards at least once a week. For additional mold vigilance, you can spray the [EC3 Mold Spray](#) on rugs and upholstery prior to and after vacuuming. Then, allow the spray to air dry.



2. Use Microfiber or electrostatic dusters and dusting cloths. These trap and collect dust much more effectively than a rag or paper towel. The dust is literally attracted to the material and sticks there. With rags, the dust can just get pushed around and not really picked up. The disposable ones can be expensive, but in my experience, they have been well worth the money. If you have to use a rag or cloth, moisten it first with a non-toxic dusting spray, like the one I make [HERE](#), and then use it to dust. Also, if you are using a reusable cloth, wash it immediately after your dusting is complete and use the [EC3 Laundry Additive](#) in the rinse cycle. Allowing the dusty cloth to sit around will only serve to redistribute the dust that you worked so hard to clean up.



3. **Dust first, vacuum second.** The age-old question of which comes first can be summed up with this list item. I always vacuum second to make sure to suck up any dust that was pushed to the floor or that became airborne and resettled to the floor. Since it can take more than 2 hours for dust to resettle after a thorough cleaning, I dust one day and then like to vacuum the next. When in doubt, though, or pressed for time to do one or the other, I have to say that vacuuming is most effective, because the dust is actually removed from the environment.



4. **Have your vacuum regularly cleaned and serviced.** If your vacuum is dirty, clogged or not sealed, or if a belt is loose, you risk blowing the dirt and dust you are sucking up all over your home again. Most vacuum dealers offer a free yearly tune up. You can also go to the website for whatever vacuum brand you own to find their recommendations on how and where to have it serviced. Another part of this is to make sure you are changing your vacuum bags frequently or not allowing the canister to overfill. When it gets too full, you also risk blowing dirt and dust back into your environment. Also, if you use a maid service, make sure they use your vacuum. Many services use company vacuums, usually non HEPA. Sharing a vacuum can distribute mold from house to house. You DO NOT want that problem.
5. **Dispose of dust trash immediately.** When you empty your vacuum, remove a full vacuum bag or dispose of dusting cloths, go ahead and take out the trash. When those things sit in your trash can with dust on them, a small disturbance and put all of that dust right back into your home.



6. **Change HVAC Air Filters every 1-3 months.** You will be surprised how effective your HVAC filters can be at preventing dust, if you change them often. I have our thermostats set to alert us when it is time to change ours. It alerts every 60 days. If you are doing any kind of renovations or work that creates or stirs up dust/dirt, I recommend changing your filters as soon as the work is complete, even if you just changed them. Once full of dust, the filters, which are the first line of defense against contaminants entering your central air flow cannot do their job. It may seem like a pain, but filters are relatively inexpensive and so important for air quality.



7. **Caulk and seal openings to the outside.** You would be surprised how much household dust is dirt and mold flowing in from the outside air. If you have a large amount of outside air coming in around windows and door frames, through floor boards, or even through your dryer vent, your indoor dust levels will be high. Simply going around your home and sealing these spots will help significantly.



8. **Remove shoes before entering your home.** Since two thirds of the dust present in your home has been tracked inside or blown inside from the outside air, the importance of removing your shoes is twofold: 1) Shoes are laden with dirt, bacteria and toxins from the soil and surfaces outside. As a matter of fact, DDT is STILL being found in floor dust samples, even though it was banned decades ago; 2) Any mold that you encounter on the ground or in other environments is hitchhiking on your shoes straight into your home. Lessen your exposure by removing your shoes. ([HERE](#) is my post on cleaning shoes for mold, if you want to read more.)



9. **Mop your floors at least 1 time a week.** Mopping is the best way to fully remove dust from your floors. The wet mop will pick up whatever the vacuum or duster leaves behind. It will also physically clean up dirt, mold, bacteria and toxins. Make sure to vacuum or Swiffer your floors first, and then mop. I use our steam mop on all of our floors. The high-heat sanitizes without chemicals. You can use just about any kind of mop. If you are using a cleaning solution, adding ½ cup of [EC3 Laundry Additive](#) per gallon of warm water is an excellent way to combat mold.

10. **Beat cushions and rugs every 3 weeks.** This is something that was new to me. I had never really done this until I became conscious of mold and dust. But, just as dust builds up on your floors and hard-surface furnishings, it also builds up on rugs and cushions. Every 3 weeks, remove all of your cushions and area rugs, and one by one, take them outside and shake and/or beat them with a broom handle to dislodge any dust, dirt and debris. Before I return mine to their proper places, I spray them thoroughly with the [EC3 Mold Spray](#). This will leave the dust outside and make everything smell fresh inside. I like to vacuum first, take them outside to shake or beat the dust free, and then spray them with [EC3 Mold Spray](#). Wear an N-95 or P-100 and safety goggles. Ear plugs too.



11. **Change sheets 1 time a week and wash with hot water and [EC3 Laundry Additive](#).** Our beds and bedding contain enormous amounts of organic materials—dead skin, hair, dirt, lint, sweat, dust, food particles, etc. In order to abate and prevent dust, you really need to stay on top of cleaning your bedding. Once a week, strip all of the beds in your home and wash all of your sheets and linens with a mild detergent in hot water. Use the [EC3 Laundry Additive](#) in the rinse cycle. The hot water will also kill any dust mites.

12. **Get rid of clutter and old magazines and books.** Unfortunately, if it is lying around, it is collecting dust. I don't want to tell you how to live, but if you don't need it, or don't use it, consider selling it or giving it away. Magazines and books actually make dust as they age. In today's digital age, consider using online versions of magazines, or only keeping your favorite editions or favorite books.



13. **Wipe walls from top to bottom at least 1 time a year.** As part of your spring cleaning or winter weather prep, begin the practice of taking it one room at a time and wiping your walls down for dust. Get an old rag, moisten it with [EC3 Mold Spray](#) and wipe the walls from top to bottom. You will be shocked by how dirty your rag becomes. I just pick one room a day for a week or so. If you do it this way, it doesn't feel as overwhelming. You will need a ladder or step stool for this. I promise you, if you put in the work to do this, your home will not get nearly as dusty and your indoor air quality will improve markedly.



14. **Make sure there is no lint trapped in dryer vent and clean your lint trap before every use.** Dryers create infinite amounts of lint. Tending to this list item will not only help your dryer to remove more dust and lint from your clothing while it is drying, but it will also prevent house fires.



15. **Use portable purifiers and air filters.** Placing [air purifiers and filters](#) in bedrooms or frequently used rooms will help to remove the dust and other contaminants from the air. Any additional HEPA filtration is a plus when it comes to dust.
16. **Use fewer textiles in home decorating.** The more fabric and textiles that you have in your home, the more fuzzy lint and dust that occurs. If you are battling dust and have to choose between a leather sofa and a fabric one, the leather one is the better choice.



It is amazing how much dust can accumulate in a toilet

17. **Keep toilet paper and paper towels in closets with doors, or in plastic bins with lids.** closet just for the paper products! The amount of dust that these two innocuous items create is astounding. Have you ever noticed how dusty your toilet paper holder gets? Simply keeping your extras in a contained space or plastic bin with a lid can help matters greatly.

