

COCKROACH ALLERGY



- Allergies occur in people who are more sensitive than “normal” people to innocent substances in their environment. The substances in the environment that cause the symptoms are allergens.
- Allergens are substances to which you are allergic. Many things in the environment can be allergens: some indoors, some outdoors and some taken in as foods or medicines.
- Allergens differ from patient to patient. There is no “one size fits all” list of allergens! Your symptoms may be caused by your specific allergy triggers. To find out what triggers your symptoms, your doctor needs to find out where and when the symptoms are worst, and then do skin or blood tests to look for “the allergy antibody”, called IgE. (See “What is an allergy?”)

WHAT IS COCKROACH ALLERGY?

- Cockroach allergy occurs when someone who is prone to developing allergy has a reaction to allergens from cockroaches.
- The most common types of allergic reactions are asthma and hay fever.

CONTACT WITH COCKROACHES

- There are over 3.500 cockroach species globally with three common ones found in South Africa. These are German, American and Oriental cockroaches.
- No-one likes to have cockroaches in their homes! One single female can produce up to 300 babies, which and they in turn reproduce. Countries with warm climates such as USA, Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan, India, Egypt, Latin America and South Africa (especially near the coast) have high levels of cockroach infestation and allergy.

HOW DO COCKROACHES CAUSE ALLERGY?

- Cockroach allergens are found in dried cockroach bodies, scales, hairs and faeces.
- People with cockroach allergy are often also allergic to other insects such as house dust mites (See: “House dust mite allergy” pamphlet)
- The highest levels of cockroach allergen are found in kitchens.



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MANAGEMENT OF COCKROACH ALLERGY

- Avoiding cockroaches or reducing exposure is the first step to reducing symptoms from cockroach allergy.
- The symptoms of the specific problem can be treated with medication.

AVOIDANCE

- Cockroaches are very strong and difficult to eliminate.
- Cockroaches live in houses belonging to all people, rich and poor.
- Cockroaches love living in the kitchen, especially under the sink and near the fridge, rubbish bin, and stove. There may be a smaller infestation in bathrooms.
- Cut down on the food supply to cockroaches:
 - Vacuum-clean or sweep the floor after every meal
 - Keep rubbish in a tight-lidded container
 - Keep unused dry foods in tightly sealed containers
- Dry up their water-supply:
 - Fix dripping taps
 - Clean the kitchen sink every night
- Don't over-water house plants
- Make it difficult for them to hide:
 - Keep old food cans, newspapers and magazines out of the house
 - Keep sink plugs over the drains at night
- Remove the dead cockroaches efficiently
 - Use an AFSA-approved vacuum cleaner with a hepa filter to clean around and behind all lamps starting with the ceiling
 - Use an AFSA-approved air conditioner and replace filters when required
 - Clean inside air-conditioning units and ventilation tubing

