



Improve the air quality *inside* your car

Your car may be making you sick!

According to AllerDays, an information service that provides data on allergies and their causes, Americans spend a half billion dollars per year on allergy treatment alone. To alleviate discomfort, sufferers diligently clean their homes from top to bottom, but many forget to clean the other place they spend a great deal of time in—their cars. Our vehicles offer numerous damp, dark moist areas where mold and mildew not only survive but flourish. Cars can be a rolling warehouse of dust, spoiled food and human and animal dander as well as chemicals and fumes released from fabrics and other synthetic materials.

Here's where to look for these culprits and what you can do to eliminate them:



■ **Under the hood.** Dirt, dust and grime love to accumulate on top of the engine. Leaking engine oil and moisture from the cooling and air-conditioning systems attract and hold dust mold and other allergens. A clogged air-conditioning evapo-

rator can allow condensation and rainwater to accumulate and become a breeding ground for bacteria and fungi. Most people think turning on their air conditioner will protect them against exterior pollutants, but if the system is contaminated, it can compound the problem, especially if the recirculation switch is on.

These areas are tough to get at and thoroughly clean. If you detect a musty smell or other odor when you turn on the vents or air conditioning, take the car to your dealer and explain the problem. This job is too tough for the average do-it-yourselfer. Ask for an estimate, because some models are more expensive to clean than others. You may want to shop around a bit. The dealer or other mechanic can clean the evaporator case with special cleaners and clean the engine compartment to get rid of the grime and pollutants that accumulate under the hood. Also examine the cowl at the base of the windshield and remove any dead leaves, which hold moisture and mold. The cowl is an

intake for your car's ventilation system, so keeping this area clean will help improve the inside air quality.

■ **Inside the car.** Food particles, pet dander and fumes from vinyl, plastics and carpeting can accumulate here. Bad weatherstripping, rusty body panels or a bad windshield seal can let in moisture and cause water to accumulate in the carpeting and under mats.

If you or someone else in your family has allergies, never eat or smoke in your car. If your car contains food particles and pet dander, vacuum it thoroughly (use a HEPA filter in the garage or a regular vacuum outdoors). Get rid of old towels, newspapers, trash and whatever else you don't need inside your car. Wash the vinyl with detergent and water to remove dirt and grime and the thin film from off-gassing vinyl (two washings are recommended to reduce this problem). Take the floor mats out and wash them, then let them dry in the sun. Clean the carpets with a hot water

