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Hello there!

This e-book is designed to be a quick-read and give you a brief intro to bed bugs: how to prevent them, how to figure out whether you've have them, and what to do if you've got them.

It's six pages long and should take the average person about 10 minutes to read cover-to-cover. You can read it straight through, then click on the links that grabbed your attention. Or you can consider this a road map of sorts, with off-ramps to immediate help where you need it. Use it whatever way that helps you best.

I hope you find it useful!

Melanie

P.S. In a minute, I'm going to ask you to pick a path. But first, some good news...some bad news... and one very important warning...

First, the GOOD NEWS

1. Bed bugs aren't dangerous – they aren't poisonous and they don't transmit disease.
2. If you have them it's not your fault – they are equal-opportunity pests that don't discriminate.
3. You don't have to get rid of any of your stuff to get rid of them. Seriously, don't throw anything away – especially not your bed!
4. There are many things you can do to reduce your risk of infestation.
5. If you already have them, you CAN get rid of them (if you use the right tools and follow the right steps)

Now, the BAD NEWS

1. They can be annoying little buggers and their bites can be extremely irritating.
2. They are not all that easy to get rid of – there simply is no “one-step” solution.
3. Typical treatments that kill other bugs will not usually kill bed bugs.
4. There are many things that seem like a good idea, but will actually make your situation worse.
5. There's a lot of bed bug mis-information and dangerous advice floating around.

And finally, the WARNING:

Whatever you do, please do NOT use a total release fogger or “bug bomb” to try to treat bed bugs. Not even if it's labeled for bed bugs. It won't kill most of them. But it will scatter them and drive them further into more difficult to reach places in your home. The use of these products can also cause pesticide resistance. And that makes it harder to kill the ones that remain. Some exterminators refuse to treat homes where foggers have been released.

So please, stop and get educated before you do anything to try to control your bed bug problem.
Bed Bug Basics

Before you pick a path...let’s go over a few basics that everybody needs to know. This stuff will have implications for all types of situations, so everyone needs to know it.

Bed bugs are parasitic insects that live off the blood of mammals (usually humans). Like mosquitoes, they pierce your skin and suck your blood. But unlike mosquitoes they have never been shown to transmit any disease. They are stealthy and reclusive. They tend to feed while you’re sleeping, then scurry away to their hiding places.

Bed bugs are big enough to be seen, but their eggs and the youngest of the “baby bed bugs” (nymphs) can be very difficult to see. Adults are about the size of an apple seed and eggs and freshly hatched nymphs are about the size of a sesame seed. This video shows what live bed bugs look like at each stage of their life cycle. The life cycle page explains more about how they live including the fact (which will come in handy later) that adults can live up to 18 months – without a blood meal.

To cut to the chase, here are pictures of an adult bed bug (left) and a nymph (right) on human skin. The pictures are both public domain images, courtesy of the Centers for Disease Control archives.

You can see more pictures of bed bugs our picture gallery.

Bed bugs are notorious hitchhikers. They spread by stowing away on clothing, luggage, furniture and a host of other items. Because they are so flat, they can hide in surprising places and very easily go undetected.

You can also learn more about bed bug basics here.

Now it's time to Pick a Path...

If you're only concerned about avoiding bed bugs and preventing them from infesting your home, you can jump right down to the prevention path... Go to Bed Bug Prevention Info

If you think you might have bed bugs - but you're not sure - your best bet is to take the Bed Bug Detection path... Go to Bed Bug Detection Guidance

If you know you are dealing with bed bugs and you need to find out how to effectively get rid of them, then this is where you need to start on the path... Go to Bed Bug Pest Control Help

Of course, there's no rule against reading the whole guide cover to cover.
Bed Bug Detection

Think you might have bed bugs, but aren't sure? Need to know how to check for bed bugs when you travel? Then this is the right stop on the path for you. Your goals here are to learn the symptoms and signs of bed bug infestation, how to inspect for bed bugs, and how to make an accurate identification.

Quick note: If you've already found a live bug... head on over to the picture gallery now and compare it with the photos there to see if you have a match. If it's a match, you're done here. And so are your inspection efforts for now. You just graduated to the Bed Bug Pest Control path.

Bites are usually the first symptoms of bed bugs that people notice. But, bites alone are not evidence of a bed bug infestation. The symptoms of bed bug bites mimic many other things. Plus, many people don't react to bed bug bites, so you could have a major infestation and not even know it! The bottom line is this...you need physical proof.

Basically, you have three bed bug detection options: do your own detective work, have an exterminator complete an inspection, or hire a bed bug detection dog sniff them out for you. There are also some tools like bed bug monitors/traps that can help you diagnose a bed bug infestation if you don't find anything at first. Most people start with the DIY method, and if you're traveling that's your only option. It's not that hard to do your own detective work if you know some key things.

First, you need to know what you're looking for. Of course you need to know what bed bugs look like in all stages of their life cycle. But you also need to be aware that there are 9 signs of infestation that bed bugs can leave behind to clue you in to their presence.

Next, you need to know where and how to look for them. Bed bugs are freakishly flat, and they are able to squeeze themselves into amazing places. They are most often found near where they feed (the bed or a couch) but they seek shelter in any crack or crevice they can find. You can learn about the Top 8 Bed Bug Hideouts and some rather surprising other places they are found here. The issue of how to do a bed bug inspection yourself is easily resolved by following these step-by-step instructions.

Finally, it is important to do what you can to prevent an infestation from spreading when you do your detective work. This article will help you plan ahead to reduce the risk of spreading bed bugs while you're getting up close and personal with their hideouts.

We touched on this above, but it's an important note: The moment you find a live bug – STOP! Your inspection is over, at least for the time being. You need to confirm what it is, then take appropriate action. Once you have found a bug, head on over to the picture gallery to compare it with the photos there and see if you have a match.

If what you found is a live bed bug: It's time to get head over to Bed Bug Pest Control.

If you found nothing, or what you found is NOT a bed bug: Great! But you still need to know how to avoid and prevent them. You can skip pest control and move straight to Bed Bug Prevention.

Still not sure whether what you found is a bed bug? The good news is that you can usually get a professional identification for free! Find out three ways to do that here.
Bed Bug Pest Control

If you've made a positive ID on a *live bed bug*, then this is the path for you. (If you have only found signs of the symptoms of bed bug infestation, go back to the Bed Bug Detection path for now until you have properly identified a live bed bug).

**First of all, don't panic.** Having bed bugs can be terribly frustrating, but it's not the end of the world. No matter how long you've been dealing with these little suckers, your situation is manageable. You just need to take the right steps and avoid common mistakes that will make the situation worse.

**Second, don't do anything just yet...** (Remember that warning on page one about using foggers?) You need to take a little bit of time to learn your options and how they work. Then you'll put together the best action plan for your particular situation.

Bed bugs are not like other household pests. Dealing with them effectively takes an Integrated Pest Management approach. What's that? In the simple terms, IPM means using multiple tools and techniques together to get the job done effectively, with the least amount of risk to your health, the environment and your bank account.

To put it another way, there is no one-shot “quick & easy” solution for bed bugs, despite what all the hype would have you believe. Luckily, creating a solid bed bug pest control plan will not be as hard as you think. The major steps are already laid out for you here...

Of course you'll need to fill in some of the details yourself. Those answers will depend on your budget, your preferences regarding chemical vs. non-chemical treatments, and how severe your infestation is. Here are just a few of the tools and techniques you might end up using:

- Tools like encasements, monitors/traps, your dryer, your vacuum, low vapor steamers...
- Chemical treatments like liquid pesticides and dusts (remember: never foggers!)
- Whole house heat treatment (never a DIY project) or fumigation

Whatever treatment options you choose, it's important to know these things first: what it does and how it does it, how effective it is, how to use it properly and safely, and what risks are associated with it. The good news is that many of the recommended actions cost very little to implement. The better news is that hiring a well qualified exterminator to do the bulk of the work for you will usually save you time, money and a lot of headaches in the long run (if you can afford it).

**But...and this is BIG but...you need to find the right kind of exterminator** to deal with bed bugs most effectively. Not all exterminators are well trained and experienced with treating bed bugs specifically. The resurgence of bed bugs is a relatively recent phenomenon and not all pest control operators are up to speed on best practices. Plus, with bed bugs all over the news, and more and more people being affected, bed bug pest control has become a “hot” business. Just ask this guy. →

By asking the right questions and making sure your pest control company meets certain requirements, you'll choose one that really knows how to do the job, and has solid experience doing it.

For more information, visit the Pest Control Section at BedBug-Answers.com.

**Once you're you're bed bug-free...** you'll need to to effectively avoid and prevent them so you don't ever have to go through this again. If you haven't already been there, hit the Bed Bug Prevention path now. If you've already done that, you can jump to some final notes here...
Bed Bug Prevention

Congratulations! You're bed bug-free. Now let's do all we can to keep you that way!

The key to bed bug prevention is understanding that they aren't everywhere, but they could be anywhere. Remember what I said back in the beginning about bed bugs being equal opportunity pests? Keep in mind that they can be found in the most luxurious hotels just like they're found in budget motels and youth hostels. Plus, they can be a lot of places that you might not have thought of like movie theaters, retail stores, hospitals, libraries, schools, etc. You can read more about creating the right mindset to successfully prevent bed bugs here.

Now before you start to freak out, consider this...

You can significantly reduce your risk of letting bed bugs into your home. All it really takes is some knowledge of how bed bugs spread, then making conscious decisions to avoid them where possible and prevent them from infesting your home if you do come into contact with them. Learning the ABCs of Bed Bug Prevention is a good place to start.

Bed bugs spread by attaching themselves to items that are then transported to another place. Because they are so small and so flat, it's quite easy for them to do this undetected. Some of their favorite modes of travel include clothing, handbags, luggage and furniture.

A little recon goes a long way. By checking the places you're planning to stay for reports of bed bugs ahead of time, you can make smart choices about where to stay and where to avoid.

Whenever you stay away from home, you need to check for bed bugs when you arrive. This goes for staying with family and friends as well as hotels. We'll get to that a little later in the detection section.

Speaking of detection, any new or used furniture should be carefully inspected for bed bugs before you haul it through the house.

If you are exposed to bed bugs, fear not. There are plenty of things you can do to reduce the risk of them infesting your home. You'll need to contain and de-bug any potentially affected items before you bring them back in your home.

Some items can be de-bugged in your home dryer, believe it or not! Sustained temperatures above 120° will kill bed bugs (and their eggs) so this is a good option for clothing and bedding. Other items will need to be thoroughly inspected and possibly treated before put away.

Finally, protecting your bed with encasements is one of the most effective things you can do to prevent bed bugs from moving in. Make sure you get ones that are specifically designed and tested for bed bugs. You'll need them for your pillows, mattresses and box springs. Not only do these encasements prevent bed bugs from getting into your mattress and infesting it, they make it very easy to do periodic checks for signs of bed bugs. Bed bug monitors/traps are also a great way to keep on the look out for bed bugs trying to make themselves at home.

The next stop on your path is bed bug detection. You need to know how to find them when you're traveling to be able to avoid bringing them home.

If you've already been to the detection section, you can jump to the end for some final notes now.
Some final notes...

Wherever you find yourself on your bed bug journey, don't fret. There are answers available and help to be found.

Dealing with a bed bug infestation can be mind-blowingly irritating, and the options can seem overwhelming at first. You will be tempted to buy-in to the fix-it-quick mentality. I know. I've been there. But don't take the bait. Chances are, you'll regret it in the end. Get your head on straight and commit to knowing what, why, and how to do something - before you do it. Make sure you also understand any potential risks and safety precautions you need to take.

Remember that the best solutions depend on not jumping the gun by doing whatever seems like a good idea at the moment. Take the time to learn your options, and follow a step-by-step pest control plan based on IPM principles. That's your best bet for getting rid of bed bugs quickly and permanently.

If you're overwhelmed by anxiety and itch, start by learning about encasements and get your bed properly protected. There is no reason that I have ever heard of not to do this. It will work wonders to reduce the number of bed bugs (and bites) you have to deal with immediately. This is also one of the techniques for dealing with bed bugs that has no risk associated with it.

You can also find help for preventing and treating bed bug bites here.

Don't isolate. Share your frustrations and anxiety with others. If you don't have someone you can talk to, the Bed Bugs Answers community offers a safe place to tell your story and share what you're going through. Sometimes it helps just to get things off your chest. And it always helps to know you're not the only one dealing with this. For starters, you can read our story here.

Hang on to this guide as a quick-reference tool and check out the parts of the site that have the answers you need when you need them. You can also go straight to the website at www.bedbug-answers.com.

Finally, you have permission to share this guide (electronically or in print form) with anyone you think will benefit from it - as long as you don't charge them anything. See the copyright details on the front cover for more detail. Please help others as you have been helped.

All the best!

Melanie

Bed Bug Answers

www.bedbug-answers.com