

# Psocids in the kitchen



nabim

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This information sheet has been produced to assist householders who may encounter psocids (booklice) within home store cupboards.

## What are psocids?

Occasionally, householders find tiny (1-2mm) grey or brown insects in their food cupboards and especially in dry goods such as flour, milk powder, sugar or semolina. These are booklice or psocids (pronounced so-sids) and the main pest species in the UK is *Liposcelis bostrychophila*. Infestations are not caused by poor hygiene and are just as common in the cleanest of homes; they can be found in new houses as well as in older ones.



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Psocids prefer to live in dark, warm, humid places – such as the folds of packaging in food cupboards – and dislike light or disturbance. They feed on a wide variety of food products as well as the microscopic moulds and algae that develop in humid conditions.

Living up to 6 months, a female may lay up to 100 eggs during her lifetime. Psocids can rapidly increase in number particularly in summer and early autumn when conditions are warmer.

Several independent studies have shown that the psocid species, which causes problems in homes, does not originate from food manufacturers, processors or retailers. They are most unlikely to be brought into the home in fresh, sealed and packaged foods. The kitchen often provides the conditions that this insect needs, and fitted cupboards provide the darkness which attracts them. Often, they emerge from their living places in the summer and problems are often first noticed at the end of the summer

Psocids prefer starchy, moist foods and will abandon their present food source in favour of a newer, fresher supply. This is because most starchy food, including flour, dries with age. Therefore, a newly purchased unopened bag of flour may become infested within hours or days of purchase even though older bags in the cupboard may no longer show any visible signs of the previous infestation.

## Prevention of psocids in the home

- Inspect food storage areas regularly for psocids.
- Store food in air-tight containers and/or use quickly once opened.
- Store foods in well ventilated, cool and dry cupboards. Avoid cupboards with condensation or which are damp.
- Seal potential hiding places, such as chipboard without a laminated finish, with paint or mastic.
- Clean cupboards regularly with a vacuum cleaner. Do not use a wet cloth as this may encourage infestations.

### To prevent reintroduction of psocids, after cleaning:

- Put containers and packaging in the freezer for 24 hours (enclosed in a plastic bag). This will kill any eggs or juveniles.
- Ensure that labels on food containers are securely fastened to prevent psocids hiding behind the paper.
- Householders should not use insecticides against psocids in kitchens as this may contaminate food. Follow label guidance if applying insecticides in kitchens against other pests.
- Inspect your food cupboards regularly and repeat treatment if necessary.
- Always store dry foods in a cool dry place.

## Control of psocids in the home

If psocids appear, you should:

- Remove and dispose of infested food or debris in an outside bin and thoroughly clean cupboards, particularly crevices, using a vacuum cleaner. Dispose of the vacuum cleaner bag immediately after use.
- Check other foods in the cupboard.



If the problem persists, you should contact the Environmental Health Department of your local council.

**For more information visit:**

<http://fabflour.co.uk/fab-flour/how-to-store-flour/>

<http://www.kcl.ac.uk/ip/bryanturner/other/index-psocids.html>

[http://www.bpca.org.uk/pages/?page\\_id=152](http://www.bpca.org.uk/pages/?page_id=152)

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