

ARE YOU ALLERGIC TO YOUR PET????

Signs of allergic reactions are many: itching, “hives,” frequent rubbing of your eyes or nose, stuffy nose, watery nasal discharge, shortness of breath, wheezing, and sneezing are some of the more common signs.

Allergy is the most widespread chronic condition and sensitivities to animals are some of the most frequently blamed problems. With 6-8% of the population allergic to pets, the U.S. alone has between 15-20 million people who have allergies.

Being allergic to pets does NOT mean you can't have a pet or that you must give up one you now have. Learning more about minimizing pet-related allergies and making some minor changes in your environment will frequently solve the problem.

Allergies to pets can be heartbreaking. Allergies often develop years after acquiring a pet, by which time a strong emotional attachment has developed. Studies have shown that even though the doctor may advise the patient to get rid of the pet, most opt to suffer with their symptoms rather than give away a loved dog or cat after years of companionship. Giving your pet up for adoption should be your last resort.

THERE ARE NO NON-ALLERGIC ANIMALS. Any animal with fur or feathers can trigger an allergic reaction. Cats are by far the worst offenders, followed by rabbits, dogs, and horses. Some animals seem more tolerable than others because they shed fewer “allergens,” however there are no dogs or cats that do not cause some type allergic response. Short hair or long hair does not make any difference. The spreading of allergens is less of a problem with small, furred animals that are kept in cages, but even they can cause allergy signs.

ALLERGIES ARE CUMULATIVE. They build up. If a person is allergic to animal dander and saliva, they're probably also allergic to other substances found around the house. Dust, molds, mildew, feathers, paint, perfume, soaps, fabric softeners, pesticide sprays, and smoke can all cause allergic reactions.

Whether or not a person has symptoms depends on how many allergens are in the environment at the same time. An individual who is allergic to animals may exhibit no noticeable symptoms when the total exposure is below his/her allergy threshold level, but when there are enough allergens in the environment to exceed this limit, the trouble begins. The goal is to minimize exposure to airborne allergens that exceed tolerance thresholds and trigger attacks.

WHAT ARE THE ANIMAL “ALLERGENS?”

1. **DANDER.** Dander is the collection of microscopic dead skin cells, scales, and flakes that an animal is continually shedding. It is the protein of this debris that causes reactions. Dander tends to be more of a problem with dogs than cats, although it is common to both. Dander imbeds itself in the carpeting, furniture, and draperies remaining in the environment to cause reactions.
2. **“FED-D-1”.** This is the cat allergen that is a major cause of allergic reactions. During a cat's licking process to clean itself, this allergen is in the saliva and is deposited on the fur. This allergen is also produced by the oil glands of the cat.
3. **PROTEINS IN THE URINE OF FERRETS, GUINEA PIGS, HAMSTERS, MICE, RATS, DOGS & CATS.**
4. **BIRDS** spread allergens into the air as they flutter, preen themselves, and move about.

HOW TO CONTROL ALLERGIES.

1. Wash your hands after handling any animal. Try not to touch your face, especially your eyes & nose until after you have done so. Keep some cleansing towelette packets handy for emergencies.
2. Brush and comb your pet regularly. This will keep mats and tangles that collect dirt, dander and pollen from forming. Even more important, it removes loose hair before it has a chance to circulate throughout the house. Rinsing your pet 1-2 times/week with distilled water will wash a great deal of pollen and dander down the drain. Wiping your pet daily with a damp towel also removes dander and loose hair.
3. Consider having your pet bathed and groomed by a professional groomer to keep the skin and coat healthy and minimize your own exposure to hair and dander.
4. Pet sprays are available designed to reduce dander and shedding. LoShed® and Allerpet® are two commonly available brands. They are applied daily at first and then once or twice weekly after that.
5. The house. Keep everything as clean and free of dust and dander as possible. Dust all surfaces regularly with a damp cloth. Vacuum the floors instead of sweeping—it stirs up less dust. Change vacuum bags frequently. Make your vacuum cleaner more efficient by using electrostatic filter bags. Open a screened window to improve ventilation. Avoid heavy carpets, ornately carved or stuffed furniture, fabric wall coverings, textured wallpapers, dust gathering accessories, and rough textured curtains or drapes.

The more washable surfaces in your home the better. Choose furniture with smooth wooden surfaces and simple lines, walls that can be washed easily, blinds that wipe clean, and floors of hardwood, tile, or linoleum.

Dust from cat litter can aggravate allergies. Plain clay litter is less irritating than brands with deodorizers. Try various brands to find the one that produces the least dust. Pour the litter into the pan slowly to keep the dust from getting in the air. Wear a gauze facemask when changing litter.

Air purifiers can dramatically improve the quality of air inside your home. One that contains a HEPA (High Efficiency Particulate Air) filter is best for pet allergy sufferers. Air conditioners and humidifiers are very beneficial during the appropriate season, but they also collect mold and can cause problems if not cleaned regularly.

Mold grows in damp and humid areas such as basements, attics, bathrooms, and closets. Check the house for damp areas that might conceal molds. Throw out all old or unused newspapers, books, magazines, clothing, and articles that are sources of mold and mildew.

Since you cannot “allergy proof” your entire home, concentrate on the bedroom. Experts say that if you can breathe “pure” air for 8-10 hours each night, you can probably tolerate more exposure to allergenic substances during the day. Encase mattresses, box springs, and pillows in allergy-proof covers. Use sheets, pillowcases, mattress pads, and bedspreads made of 100% washable cotton or cotton flannel, free of chemical finishes. Buy special non-allergenic pillows, or those filled with Dacron or polyester, NOT kapok, down, or feathers. Air bedclothes outside in sunny weather. Keep pets away from pillows or anything else that comes in contact with your nose or mouth. Shut the bedroom door when you leave. Don’t let your pet sleep with you or spend time in the bedroom, either with you or when you aren’t there.

6. Avoid undue fatigue, emotional upsets, and stress. These weaken the immune system to the point of triggering an allergic attack. A healthy diet and lifestyle, and regular exercise and fresh air will improve your overall health and lessen the severity of allergies. Don’t smoke. If you are the least bit allergic, smoking will make things much worse and increase your chances of respiratory and other health problems, as well as lower your tolerance threshold.