



Bucks County Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

AN INDEPENDENT NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION
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Living with Allergies to Animals

What are allergies?

Allergies are the body's reaction to a foreign substance that it doesn't tolerate well. Allergy-causing substances (allergens) may be inhaled or they may be ingested or triggered by skin contact. Allergens can be found in animals' hair, dander (dried skin particles), urine, feces and saliva. They can be carried on clothes and can stay in carpet and furniture for up to six months.

Allergy symptoms:

itching, runny nose, rashes, coughing, wheezing,
difficulty breathing, sneezing, swollen sinuses, and headaches.

*No breed is more or less allergenic than any other. Within one breed, animals vary widely in their ability to set off allergies.

What You Can Do? Check List

- Make sure it's really your animal you're allergic to. Researchers (University of British Columbia) found that only one-half to two-thirds of children who tested positive for allergies to dogs or cats were actually allergic to them.

Main reservoirs for allergens are: carpets, drapes, upholstered furniture, mattresses, walls and ceilings.

- Buy inexpensive vinyl encasing for mattress and box springs, and minimize upholstered furniture.
- Wash walls, ceilings, blankets, curtains and throw pillows regularly.
- Ditch the drapes. Select a lighter weight curtain that can be easily launder.
- Clean carpets well or consider replacing with tile, wood, linoleum or scatter rugs that can be taken up and washed.
- If you must have carpets, spray them with a product containing non-toxic tannic acid, which helps combat the effects of cat allergens. Carpets hold 100 times more allergens than nonporous flooring.
- Increasing your vacuum cleaner's filter replacement bags will help trap particles.
- Look for a vacuum cleaner that has a high allergen containment rating.
- Declare your bedroom off limits to animals by closing the door at all times. Provide them with their own (washable) comfortable beds and blankets instead.
- An air purifier will help rid the air of allergens. Look for a HEPA (high-efficiency particulate air) filter room
- air cleaner. (Can remove up to 100 % of small allergenic particles)
- Keep ducts, furnaces, and air conditioners filters clean and replace often.
- Free-standing cleaners are better than the small, tabletop filters
- Ventilate your house and circulate air in the house by opening windows every day.
- Researchers found that a "two cat super-insulated home--one with every crack closed tight and windows triple-glazed in the name of energy efficiency--had nearly 40 times more cat allergen by weight than an ordinary two-cat home."
- Feed your animal a higher-quality diet; healthy animals produce less dander.
- Beware of dusty or deodorized cat litter, which can be as allergenic as the cat.
- Be thorough in cleaning--search out dust, mold, animal hair- and minimize your consumption of commonly allergenic foods, like dairy. If you're allergic to an animal, you might be allergic to their by products as well. By decreasing other irritants, you'll reduce your overall symptoms.
- After petting your animal, wash your hands before touching your eyes or face.
- Avoid tobacco smoke, automobile exhaust, and other irritants that can inflame your airways.
- Have non-allergic people groom and bathe the animals and clean the litter box. Grooming should be done in a well-ventilated area, like a patio or screened porch.

Bathing Animals

- Bathing cats and dogs can help reduce allergy symptoms.
- Several baths with special shampoo may be necessary before you notice an improvement.

How To Bathe a Cat

- Fill a large pan or sink with one or two inches of lukewarm water.
- Place a heavy towel or bathmat in the bottom so the cat can grip it to feel more secure.
- Place the cat in the tub, talking in a calm voice as you move a sprinkler over his or her body.
- Feline allergens are water soluble, plain water is all you need.
- Don't use a shampoo without checking with your vet. Cats can have severe reactions to chemicals.
- Rinse well and towel dry.
- Give your cat a special treat and praise once you're done.

If your cat hates being bathed, try wiping him or her down with a wet cloth.

Medication May be Your Salvation

- New medications can make living with allergies and animals much more comfortable. There are a wide variety of nasal sprays, antihistamines, decongestants, and inhalers that can help control allergy symptoms. Your allergist can help you choose the right medication for you.
- New immunotherapy or allergy shots are more effective than ever. Studies show that immunotherapy can now be effective in about 80% of cases. (Immunotherapy induces a tolerance to cat allergen by gradually increasing the dose.)
- Talk to your doctor for more information.

Certain nutritional supplements and herbs can also minimize an allergic response, among them:

- vitamins A, B6, C and E
- quercetin
- a bioflavonoid
- flax seed oil (which contains omega-3 fatty acids)
- MSM (methylsulfonylmethane)
- Gingko

Check with your family doctor before taking any of these supplements