



Animal Allergy

Allergy to animals is a common cause of year around allergic symptoms such as sneezing, nasal congestion, itchy eyes or asthma. About 10% of the general population and 25% of people with asthma have animal allergies.

Sometimes it is easy to tell that allergic symptoms are related to an animal. But often symptoms are not present when the new pet first comes into a home. People are not born with allergic symptoms to animals, but may develop them after a number of years of exposure to the pet. It is then often difficult to make a connection between the symptoms and the pet unless allergy testing is performed.

What can you do when you discover that you have animal allergies? Avoidance of pet allergens is undoubtedly the best preventive treatment available, so removing the pet from the home is the only way to totally avoid their exposure. For people with severe asthma symptoms related to animals, this may be a necessary step in successful treatment.

However, people with mild symptoms or people who choose to keep their pets because of strong attachment to their animals can take some steps to minimize their exposure to animal allergens. First, keep the pet out of your bedroom at all times, even when you are not in the bedroom. The dander and saliva will remain there after the animal leaves your room. For this reason, it would be helpful to replace carpet and bedding in a room where an animal has lived. An air cleaner recommended by your doctor can also reduce allergen exposure.

If at all possible, try to keep your pet only in non-carpeted areas of the home where allergens are less likely to become embedded in rugs and furniture. A family member who is not allergic should do the grooming and litter box cleaning.

Or better yet, let you pet remain outside all the time. Even people with severe animal allergies can sometimes tolerate brief exposure to animals in un-enclosed outside areas.

Your choice of pet may also influence possible allergic reactions. Cats tend to cause more reactions than dogs. But remember: Any fur bearing animal may cause allergic reactions. If you are sensitive to any animals, you are likely to develop allergic sensitivity to any new fur bearing animals with continued exposure, even if you seem to tolerate them at first. So if you are allergic and are considering a new pet, why not consider getting a friendly fish, snake, lizard, turtle or hermit crab?

For people with animal allergies who are unable to reduce their animal exposure, regular medications may be needed. Medications can also be useful in preventing reactions for people who must visit friends or relatives with animals. In addition to antihistamines, newer medications (such as cromolyn) can be prescribed by a physician for use just prior to an unavoidable animal exposure.

Immunotherapy or allergy injections are also available for cat allergens if exposure is unavoidable. These injections have been shown to be quite effective in reducing symptoms and are often used in allergic animal workers such as veterinarians. However, no treatment can be as effective as complete avoidance.