

# How to Live with Allergies and Pets

You can have a happy, healthy life with your pets, even if you're allergic to them. Millions of people enjoy sharing their homes and their lives with pets, even those who are allergic to animals. Unfortunately, some people believe that once they are diagnosed with a pet allergy, they have no choice but to remove their pets from their family.

Thankfully, there are many solutions that can be explored that would allow an allergy sufferer to keep their beloved pets while successfully managing their allergies. You'd be surprised to know how many people with allergies that aren't life-threatening are able to live happily with their pets. In many cases, the benefits of having a pet outweigh the drawbacks of pet allergies.

## Understand your pet allergies

It is important to see a doctor and be tested to determine what allergies you actually have. You may find that you're allergic to something else and not your pet at all! For example, you may assume that you are allergic to your beloved dog, only to find out through an allergy test that you're actually allergic to a specific tree pollen that got on his fur during a walk together, and that's actually what's bothering you.

If an allergy test shows that you are allergic to your pet, it is important to understand what causes your allergic reaction to them. There are allergy-triggering proteins called allergens in saliva and skin glands that cling to an animal's dry skin (dander) and fur. The fur and dander then stick to walls, carpets and clothing.

The reaction of someone to these allergens is different from one person to the next. The reaction may range from mild sniffing and sneezing to life-threatening asthma. The reaction can be made worse if a person is additionally exposed to other things he is allergic to, such as pollen, dust mites, cigarette smoke, and mold.

Whether someone has an allergic reaction depends on both the individual person and the individual animal. A person with animal allergies may react less to dogs with soft, constantly growing hair, or one specific cat or dog may cause more or less of an allergic reaction than another animal of that same breed.

You may hear claims about breeds of dogs and cats that are non-allergenic (don't cause an allergic reaction) or cats and dogs that are hypoallergenic (cause less of an allergic reaction). However, even hairless breeds may cause a severe allergic reaction.

## Reduce the allergens and your symptoms

If you are allergic to your pet and your reactions aren't life-threatening, there are many ways to reduce indoor allergens and allergy symptoms so you and your pet can live together more comfortably. If you or a family member's allergies are simply miserable, but not life-threatening, take these five steps to reduce the symptoms:

1. Create an "allergy free" zone in your home—preferably the allergic person's bedroom—and strictly prohibit the pet's access to it. Use a high-efficiency HEPA air cleaner, and consider using impermeable covers for the mattress and pillows.
2. Use HEPA air cleaners throughout the rest of the home, and avoid dust-and-dander-catching furnishings such as cloth curtains and blinds and carpeted floors. Clean frequently and thoroughly to remove dust and dander, washing articles such as couch covers and pillows, curtains, and pet beds.
3. Bathe your pet on a weekly basis to reduce the level of allergy-causing dander (shed old skin cells). Cats can get used to being bathed, but it's critical to only use products labeled for them; kittens may need a shampoo safe for kittens. Check with your veterinarian's staff or a good book on pet care for directions about safe bathing. It's a good idea to use a shampoo recommended by your veterinarian or other animal care professional.
4. Don't be quick to blame the family pet for allergies. Ask your allergist to specifically test for allergies to pet dander. Many allergy sufferers are sensitive to more than one allergen. Reduce the overall allergen level in your environment by concentrating on all of the causes, not just the pet allergy.
5. Try treatments. Additional treatments for allergies to pets include immunotherapy (allergy shots), steroidal and antihistamine nose sprays and antihistamine pills. It is important to find an allergist who understands your commitment to living with your pet. A combination of approaches—medical control of symptoms, good housecleaning methods, and immunotherapy—is most likely to succeed in allowing an allergic person to live with pets.

## Be glad you didn't let allergies break up a beautiful relationship

It is worth it to preserve the bond between you and your pet by checking if you are truly allergic to your pet and, if you are, to try these solutions. Join the large number of animal lovers who manage their allergies and live happily and healthily with their beloved pets.

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