

What You Can Do to Alleviate Allergies

Some six million people in the United States are allergic to cats. Though that makes for a lot of wheezing and sneezing, there's a popular misconception out there about cat allergies—that people react to the hair of the cat. This is a myth. A cat allergy is an immune reaction to a protein (an allergen) found in a cat's dander and saliva.

Although individual cats may produce more or fewer allergens than others, all cats produce dander and saliva. The rumor that “hypoallergenic” breeds exist is yet another myth.

The major allergen found in cats comes from the Fel d1 protein, which is produced in the sebaceous glands of a cat's skin and in saliva. Fel d1 is deposited on the fur when cats lick themselves and by sebaceous-gland secretions.

Eventually, the Fel d1 in the microscopic dander and in the dried saliva flakes off and becomes airborne. Because cat allergens are so small, they can remain airborne for hours at a time and be inhaled deeply into the lungs. This is why people who are allergic to cats often experience a rapid onset of symptoms.



Not only are cat allergens able to remain airborne for long periods, they also have the ability to stay “potent” for several months. In addition, the particles are stubbornly adhesive. Clothing, furnishings and even vertical surfaces such as walls are allergen magnets.

10 Tips You Can Use

If you or your friends and family are allergic yet determined to keep company with cats, don't despair. Unless a case is severe, most cat allergies can be managed. Although it's almost impossible to “allergen-proof” a home where cats are present, there are a few things

owners can do to reduce the amount of airborne allergens in their houses:

- Use a high-efficiency particle-arresting (HEPA) air cleaner, which can reduce cat allergens by 50 percent.
- Use a vacuum with a HEPA system.
- Use highly efficient vent and furnace filters to help trap allergens.
- Remove carpeting or treat it and cloth furnishings with special cleaning products. Ask your veterinarian or a local pet-supply shop for a recommendation.
- If possible, keep your home well-ventilated during warm weather by opening windows and using exhaust fans.
- Train your cat to sleep in her own bed fitted with a washable cushion or blanket, and then wash it regularly in hot water.
- Keep your cat out of the bedroom. Encase bedding in allergen-impermeable covers.
- Be sure to scrub your hands after handling your pet.
- Have someone else groom your cat and clean out the litter box, or wear a dust mask.
- Ask your doctor about medications, therapies or immunotherapy to treat animal allergies. 🐾