



ALLERGIES



A CLOSER LOOK AT YOUR CONCERNS



Millions of people enjoy sharing their homes and their lives with pets, even those who are allergic to animals. Unfortunately, many people feel forced to give up their pet when they develop allergies, believing that once they are diagnosed 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.

Although more and more people are discovering the beneficial effects of owning a furry bundle of joy, the fact remains that roughly 15 to 20 percent of the population is allergic to animals. The result? Countless owners in unhappy, unhealthy situations—and their beloved pets are the cause! Allergen is the medical term for the actual substance that causes an allergic reaction. Touching or inhaling allergens leads to reactions in allergic individuals. Symptoms can include red, itchy, watery eyes and nose; sneezing; coughing; scratchy or sore throat; itchy skin, and most serious of all, difficulty breathing.

The most common pet allergens are proteins found in their dander (scales of old skin that are constantly shed by an animal), saliva, urine and sebaceous cells. Any animal can trigger an allergic response, but cats are the most common culprits. People can also become allergic to the urine, dander and saliva of exotic pets such as ferrets, guinea pigs, birds, rabbits and rodents. There is no species or breed to which humans cannot develop allergies. Fur length and type will not affect or prevent allergies. Certain pets can be less irritating than others to those who suffer from allergies, but that is strictly on an individual basis and cannot be predicted.

Once the diagnosis of a pet allergy is made, a physician will often recommend eliminating the companion animal from the surroundings. Heartbreaking? Yes. Absolutely necessary? Not always. Keep in mind that most people are allergic to several things besides pets, such as dust mites, molds and pollens, all of which can be found in the home. Allergic symptoms result from the total cumulative allergen load. That means that if you eliminate some of the other allergens, you may not have to get rid of your pet. (Conversely, should you decide to remove your pet from your home, this may not immediately solve your problems.) You must also be prepared to invest the time and effort needed to decontaminate your home environment, limit future exposure to allergens and find a physician who will work with you.

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 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 too, 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.

BASIC ADVICE FOR COPING WITH ALLERGIES

AN EASY 3 STEP APPROACH

1- Improving the Immediate Environment

- **Create an allergen-free room.** A bedroom is often the best and most practical choice. By preventing your pet from entering this room, you can ensure at least eight hours of freedom from allergens every night. It's a good idea to use hypoallergenic bedding and pillow materials.
- **Limit fabrics.** Allergens collect in rugs, drapes and upholstery, so do your best to limit or eliminate them from your home. If you choose to keep some fabrics, steam-clean them regularly. Cotton-covered furniture is the smartest choice, and washable blinds or shades make good window treatments. Use washable scatter rugs in your home, rather than wall-to-wall carpet. Launder other items such as bedspreads, sheets, and slip covers frequently.
- **Vacuum frequently** using a vacuum equipped with a HEPA (high-efficiency particulate arresting) filter or a disposable electrostatic bag. Other kinds of bags will permit allergens to blow back out of the vacuum.
- **Install an air purifier** fitted with a HEPA filter. Our modern, energy-efficient homes lock in air that is loaded with allergens, so it's smart to let in some fresh air daily.
- **Use anti-allergen room sprays.** These sprays deactivate allergens, rendering them harmless. Ask your allergist for a product recommendation.
- **Clean the litter box frequently.** Use lowdust, perfume-free filler. Clumping litter is a good choice.
- **Dust regularly.** Wiping down the walls will also cut down on allergens.
- **Invest in washable pet bedding** and cages that can be cleaned often and easily.

2- Decontaminating Your Pet

- **Bathe your pet at least once a week.** Bathing works to wash off the allergens that accumulate in an animal's fur and reduce the level of allergy-causing dander (old skin cells). Your veterinarian or local pet store can recommend a shampoo that won't dry out your pet's skin (very important). Cats can get used to being bathed, but it's critical to only use products that are labeled for your specific pet (cat/dog). Kittens and puppies may need shampoos safe for them.
- **Wipe your pet with a product formulated to prevent dander** from building up and flaking off into the environment. Ask your veterinarian to suggest one that is safe to use on animals who groom themselves. For example, you can try Allergen (there are different formulas for cats and dogs).
- **Note any symptoms of dermatitis** exhibited by your companion animal. Dermatitis often leads to accelerated skin and fur shedding, which will up your allergen exposure.
- **Brush or comb your pet frequently.** It's best to do this outdoors, if possible. (The ASPCA does not recommend keeping cats outdoors, so make sure your feline is leashed if you take him outside.)

Animal Resource Center

www.charlestonanimalsociety.org/GetPetHelp



- **Add a coat conditioner to your pet's food** to prevent skin dryness, which can increase shedding.

3- Taking Care of Yourself

- **If possible, have someone other than yourself** do the housecleaning, litter box work and pet washing, wiping and brushing. If you must clean the house or change the litter, be sure to wear a dust mask.
- **Wash your hands** after handling your companion animal and before touching your face. The areas around your nose and eyes are particularly sensitive to allergens.
- **Designate a "pet outfit"** from among your most easily washed clothes. Wear it when playing or cuddling with your companion, and you'll leave other clothing uncontaminated.
- **Find a physician**, preferably an allergy specialist, who will make sure that your pet is the cause of your allergies and will help alleviate your symptoms. Medications and immunotherapy (desensitizing shots) can often allow you and your companion animal to remain together happily ever after. 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.
- **Try treatments.** Additional treatments for allergies to pets are 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.



You can have a happy, healthy life with your pets, even if you're allergic to them

AFTER PUTTING THESE SOLUTIONS TO WORK... 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.

As a final note, if you or someone living with you develops a pet allergy, there are several online resources that can help, including:

- [WebMD](#)
- [ASPCA](#)
- [Animal Planet](#)

*It is important to note that many pet allergies diminish over time and exposure to the pet. In some cases, not all, allergies dissipate to the extent where it they become unnoticeable.

**If you simply must rehome your pet because your allergies are unbearable, try keeping the animal in the basement or a single room until a new home becomes available, and refer to our Placement Tips section.



First and foremost, we recommend that all pet owners consult with their veterinarian. The information contained herein is meant to be a resource. It is not exhaustive, nor does it indicate an endorsement or recommendation from Charleston Animal Society. Please use your own due diligence in researching these sources and making the best choice for your pet(s).

We'd like to give thanks and credit to the following organizations, whose published resources were utilized in addition to staff research for this compilation:

Nevada Humane Society www.nevadahumanesociety.org
ASPCA www.aspca.org
HSUS www.humanesociety.org

If you still need assistance after reviewing the information on our website, please either email or call our Animal Resource Center at help@charlestonanimalsociety.org or (843) 329-1554.

**Animal Resource Center
www.charlestonanimalsociety.org/GetPetHelp**