

Allergies to Animals

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Facts About Allergies

Millions of people in the U.S. and around the world have allergies. The tendency to develop allergies or allergic reactions is genetic. This means that it tends to run in families. If you have allergic tendencies and are exposed to certain things in your environment (allergens), you may develop allergies to some of those things. Examples of allergy symptoms include itchy eyes, runny nose, asthma symptoms, eczema and rash. [Anaphylaxis](#) is a systemic (whole body), life-threatening allergic reaction, and is the most severe type of allergic reaction. Fortunately, it is very rare and many people with allergies will not experience anaphylaxis. The timing of the allergic response may be immediate or delayed. Allergy testing may be recommended to help identify your allergies.



Allergies to Animals

Animal dander (dead skin that is continually shed), urine and saliva can cause a human allergic reactions to pets and other animals. Examples of allergy symptoms include itchy eyes, runny nose and rash. These reactions can make [asthma](#), [rhinitis](#) and/or [eczema \(atopic dermatitis\)](#) symptoms worse in some people.

The dander, urine and saliva of feathered or furry animals such as cats, dogs, birds, rodents (hamsters, gerbils, mice etc.) can cause allergy symptoms. Unfortunately, there is no such thing as a "hypo-allergenic" cat or dog, and short-haired breeds are no less of a problem than animals with long hair. Exposure to other warm-blooded animals such as livestock, or to products made with feathers or down, may also cause allergy symptoms with repeated exposure.

Environmental Control

Once an allergy has been identified, the next step is to decrease or eliminate exposure to the allergen. This is called environmental control. Evidence shows that allergy and asthma symptoms may improve over time, if the recommended environmental control changes are made. Many of the changes are for the entire home. The bedroom is the most important, because the bedroom is where people usually spend 1/3 to 1/2 of their time.

Steps to Control Animal Allergens

- Do not keep any furry or feathered pets in your home.
- If you must keep the pet, try to keep it outdoors.
- If the pet comes indoors make sure to keep it out of the allergic person's bedroom **at all times**.
- If you have forced air heating and a pet close the air ducts in the allergic person's bedroom or put a filter over air vents. Keep the bedroom door closed.
- Change the furnace filter at least monthly.
- Have a non-allergic person wash the dog or cat weekly. This person should also be the one to brush the pet — and do it outdoors.
- Keep the pet away from fabric-covered furniture and carpet as much as possible.
- After exposure to the pet, wash your hands and change your clothes.
- Avoid visits to friends and relatives with feathered or furry pets. Ask your doctor about using a medicine as a pretreatment before you visit a home with a pet.
- Choose a pet without feathers or fur (fish, reptiles, amphibians).
- Use a portable HEPA air cleaner to remove dander from the air in the bedroom. Be aware that the benefits may be limited because of the large reservoir of dander in furniture and carpet.

Your health care provider may recommend additional medications, therapies or other environmental controls. Exposure to furry or feathered animals can make allergy, asthma and/or eczema symptoms worse in some people. To avoid these problems follow the above steps to decrease or eliminate exposure.

Visit our website for more information about support groups, clinical trials and lifestyle information.

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