

Your Health:

Cat Allergy

An old Italian proverb states, "Happy is the home with at least one cat." If only that were true.

For allergy sufferers, the home with a cat can be anything but happy. Only in America between 47 and 95 million people with allergies are allergic to their pets—and cat allergies are the clear winner, leading dogs by two to one.

What Causes Cat Allergies?

The human immune system usually gets it right but, in the case of allergies, instead of attacking a foreign virus or bacteria, it goes after something harmless instead. In the case of a cat allergy, it is reacting to proteins in the animal's dander, saliva or urine. The offending protein is known as an allergen.

Cats secrete these sticky proteins into their dander where they eventually end up everywhere from the feline's fur to between the couch cushions.

Living with the allergy:

There are ways for an allergic person to live with a beloved pet, and here are the options.

1.) Adopt a hypoallergenic cat

What is A hypoallergenic Cat?

Low allergen, or "hypoallergenic" cats are those that typically produce fewer allergens than "regular" cats. The operative word here is "fewer." Hypoallergenic is not synonymous with non-allergenic, and no breed is completely non-allergenic.

Several Factors Affect Cats' Allergen Production:

- Males produce more allergenic secretions than females
- Intact males produce more than neutered males
- Dark cats tend to produce more than light-colored ones (no one knows why)
- Kittens produce fewer allergens than adults

Breeds that are hypoallergenic:

- [Balinese:](#)
- [Oriental Shorthair](#)
- [Javanese](#)

- [Devon Rex](#)
- [Cornish Rex](#)

- [Sphynx](#)
- [Siberian](#)

2.) Take medication.

- Telfast 180
- antihistamines (Benadryl or Claritin)
- corticosteroids (Flonase or Nasonex)
- over-the-counter decongestant sprays
- cromolyn sodium (prevents the release of immune system chemicals; may reduce symptoms)
- leukotriene modifiers (Singulair)
- allergy shots (immunotherapy: a series of shots that "desensitize" a person to an allergen)

3.) Take steps to minimize the symptoms of the allergy.

- ban the cat from the bedroom
- remove the cat's favourite hangouts, including wall-to-wall carpets and upholstered furniture (wood or tiled flooring and clean walls help reduce allergens)
- select throw rugs that can be washed in hot water and wash them frequently
- cover heating and air-conditioning vents with a dense filtering material such as cheesecloth
- install an air cleaner
- even though the cat will hate it, bathe him regularly (every six weeks or so)
- recruit a non-allergic person to regularly remove dander and clean the litter box
- A home remedy for cat allergies is a nasal lavage. Salt water (saline) is used to rinse an allergic individual's nasal passages, thus reducing congestion, postnasal drip, and sneezing. Several over-the-counter brands are available, or salt water can be made at home by combining 1/8 teaspoon of table salt with 8 ounces of distilled water.
- High-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filters are one of the best attacks against cat allergies. They work at reducing airborne pet allergens by forcing air through a special filter that traps pet dander (as well as pollen, dust mites, and other allergens).