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Cat allergy effects can be reduced

Do you have friends or relatives who cannot come to your home because you own cats? Do you own a cat despite recommendations from your doctor not to? If



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THE CAT DOC

the answer is yes to either of these questions, cat allergies are having an impact on your life.

Most humans are allergic to a protein in cat saliva called Fel d 1. This protein also can be found in cat dander (the scales of their skin). Hair type and length of coat are not generally the cause of allergies, although the more hair a cat has, the more dander will be present along with more saliva from cat grooming.

Some people can tolerate cats with little or no hair (Rex and Sphynx cats), but all cats have dander, and there is not a safe breed for everyone. The Siberian breed which is purported to produce less Fel d 1 than other breeds is tolerated by many people with cat allergies.

Allergy control is based on reducing exposure to allergens, and controlling or preventing the allergic reaction with medication. There is lots of research being conducted on different

treatments for controlling human allergies to cats, and there are some promising products for the future.

Ways to reduce exposure:

Do not allow cats to sleep in your bedroom. When a cat lays on your bed and pillow, you are directly applying allergens to your face every time you lie down.

Wash your hands every time you touch a cat. People unintentionally touch their eyes and faces on a regular basis, and apply allergens directly to themselves.

Regular vacuuming and dusting helps to remove allergens. Installing HEPA air filters and using air purifiers or ionizers also helps remove allergens from the air. The filters in home air conditioning and heating vents should be changed frequently. Consider removing carpet from your home since it traps many allergens. Steam clean upholstery, draperies, and bedding on a regular basis.

Do the pet allergy sprays and shampoos work? Research says they don't. The effect of wiping a cat down with distilled water every 3-7 days is probably as beneficial as using a special product. Both essentially remove dander and cat saliva from the coat.

Can you give your cat anything orally? Some people claim that treating their cat with a low dose of a tranquilizer called acepromazine helps. Research has disproved this, but I could

make an argument that a mild sedative could reduce self-grooming and therefore the amount of saliva on a cat's coat. I would not recommend this option.

Allergies are generally cumulative. If you are allergic to one thing, you are likely allergic to other things. You may be able to tolerate one cat, but not exposure to three at one time.

Medications that help:

Antihistamines are frequently used to control allergies. Take an antihistamine at least 15 minutes before cat exposure to prevent allergy symptoms.

Allergy shots, known as hyposensitization therapy, help eliminate the effects of allergens in some patients.

Cromolyn sodium is an allergy drug that comes as eye drops and nasal sprays.

Zafirlukast is medication for asthma. A study showed that this drug given before exposure can prevent and – after exposure – can minimize effects of cat allergies.

A human vaccine against cat allergies is being developed. This may be an answer in the future.

Being around cats is wonderful, but if they make you sick, you need to explore all the available options for reducing the effect of their allergens.

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