

Allergic to Cats

Many Ignore Doctor's Advice and Keep Cat

Approximately two percent of the United States population is allergic to cats. One third of these ignore medical advice and keep at least one cat in their home.



A glycoprotein, Fel d 1, secreted by the sebaceous glands, is the major cat allergen. This allergen is found in the fur, pelt, saliva, serum, urine, mucous, salivary glands, and hair roots of the cat. The main sources of the allergen, however, are the skin and saliva.

Cat allergen is so small it can remain airborne for months. It is about 10 times smaller than pollen or dust particles. According to research, it can be found in the dust of almost one third of homes that do not own a cat. It can be carried in on clothing or already be present from a previous cat owner. Studies have shown that moderate to high levels of cat allergen can even be found in schools, hospitals, and doctor's offices.

Symptoms

Cat allergy can play havoc with the eyes, nose, ears, throat, lungs, and skin.

The eyes may become red, itchy, watery, or swollen. The nose may itch, run, sneeze, or become congested. The ears may become plugged or itchy. The throat may have post-nasal drip, frequent throat clearing, itching and hoarseness. The lung symptoms may include coughing, wheezing, chest tightness, shortness of breath, and frequent bronchitis. The skin may develop itchy rashes or hives.

Are There Any Hypoallergenic Cats?

There are no hypoallergenic cats. Male cats produce substantially more of the Fel d 1 protein than female cats. Also neutered males produce less than non-neutered males. These factors, however, do not guarantee a female or a neutered cat will be safe for an allergic individual.

Preventative Measures

Two major factors that affect airborne cat allergen in the home are the quantity of soft furnishings and whether a cat is kept indoors or outdoors.

The "ideal" way to reduce cat allergen in the home is to remove the cat from the home. Once the pet is removed, then all floors should be vacuumed or mopped thoroughly, walls wiped down with a damp cloth, and rooms aired out regularly to reduce the level of cat allergen. A special filter should be used on the vacuum cleaner to prevent redepositing of the allergen into the air. Remember to replace the heating/air system filters during this process. Keep in mind that it may take up to 6 months to reduce the allergen in your home.

If removing the cat is not an option, there are ways to reduce the allergen. First, vinyl or hardward floors are recommended instead of carpet. The use of soft upholstered furniture and draperies should be minimal. Limit the cat to certain parts of the house.

The bedroom and living room should be off limits. Research shows a significant reduction in allergen levels if a cat is washed weekly.

Treatment

As with any allergy, avoidance is the main course of treatment. A cat-allergic individual should avoid being around cats at all times. However, since many cat-allergic people ignore the advice of their physicians, there are ways to help reduce the reactions.

If you are visiting a person with a cat it may be necessary to take Allergy eye drops eg. Sodium Cromoglycate (Opticrom) before you go to the house. If you have asthma induced by cats, ensure you have your Inhaler with you.

Adapted From [Judy Tidwell](http://allergies.about.com), <http://allergies.about.com>