



## Pet Allergies and Avoidance Measures

**The family pet. An important member of many American families. What if you or your child are allergic to the dander associated with our four legged friends? What can you do to reduce the amount of dander in your house? How can you control your symptoms?**

The first thing to do is understand what causes pet allergies. You are not really allergic to your pet. You are allergic to the dander which is produced by your pet. Every cat, dog, rodent, bird and most other animals with fur or feathers produce dander. Pet dander is composed of microscopic flecks of skin which are shed by animals. These bits of skin can cause reactions in people who are specifically allergic to these triggers. In addition to pet dander, other allergens, like proteins found in an animal's saliva, urine or feces may cause allergic reactions in some people.

Unfortunately, there are no "hypo-allergenic" cats or dogs. Although the fur itself is generally not a trigger, animals with fur and feathers also carry allergens, like dust, from other sources. For that reason, short-haired or hairless animals contribute dander and allergens to indoor air pollution just as effectively as long-haired animals do.

Pet allergens are small and very light weight. They can remain suspended in the air for a long time, much longer than allergens from cockroaches or dust mites for example. Because of their jagged shape, pet allergens can also easily stick to common household items like furniture, bedding, and fabrics as well as items carried in and out of the home. Because it is so easily transferrable, pet dander can even be found in homes and buildings without pets.

For some people who are allergic to pet dander or who have asthma that is triggered by pet allergies, breathing in animal allergens can make respiratory symptoms worse and lead to a decline in the ability of the lungs to function. The concentrations of an allergen required to cause a reaction varies greatly from individual to individual. People with pet allergies may experience upper and lower respiratory tract symptoms including congestion, sneezing and runny nose, as well as chest tightness and wheezing. Other symptoms are itching, watery eyes, and eczema or rashes.

The best way to protect yourself or your family members who may suffer with pet allergies is to protect indoor air quality by removing the animal from the home. Even if you do that, you must remember that pet allergens may stay in the home for months after the pet is gone. Allergy and asthma symptoms may take weeks or even months to improve after the removal of a pet.

If the pet stays in the home, here are some other tips:

- Keep the pet out of the bedroom of anyone who has asthma or allergies.
- Close the air ducts in the bedroom of anyone with asthma or allergies.
- Use a HEPA filter or air cleaner.
- Do not allow the pet on furniture, especially fabric upholstered furniture.
- Keep the pet away from carpets as much as possible and vacuum regularly. Removing carpet completely and installing hard surface flooring, like hardwood or vinyl, would also help.
- Wash the pet at least once a week but avoid more frequent pet bathing as this tends to dry out the animal's skin which could increase dander rather than decrease it.
- Clean the home often and do not allow dust to accumulate.

If you have questions about pet allergies, feel free to contact our office at 614-760-0099. One of our staff would be happy to answer your questions and discuss different treatment options offered at Allergy & Asthma Clinics of Ohio.