Human Allergies to Cats

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While we spend a lot of time discussing pets' allergies, we often forget to mention peoples' allergies to pets. There are thousands of people who suffer from allergies to animals. Some of the most heartbreaking cases I see are people who dearly love a cat or dog and then develop a severe allergy to her and must decide between keeping her and suffering daily, or placing the cat in a new home. Fortunately, there are several options for pet owners that have allergies to animals.

Who gets pet allergies?

Pet allergies can strike anyone at any age in their life. Most people that suffer from pet allergies often have other mild or moderate allergies to pollens or molds. There is believed to be a strong genetic correlation in contracting allergies. In other words, if your parents have allergies, then you are likely to have them also. According to the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology, allergies to cats or dogs occur in approximately 15% of the population.

What part of the animal are people allergic to?

People that are allergic to animals are often allergic to the dander (dead skin that is continually shed), the saliva, or the urine. Because cats and dogs are the most common pets, they top the list of animals that people are the most allergic to. However, people can also be allergic to birds, hamsters, rabbits, mice, guinea pigs, and the larger animals such as horses, goats, and cows. As people that suffer from allergies can tell you, there are often certain types of animals that they are more allergic to than others. In addition, there may be certain animals within a given species that they are more allergic to than others. This appears particularly true with cats.

What are the symptoms?

People with multiple allergies are well aware that when their allergies are acting up, they will suffer from itchy eyes, runny nose, asthma symptoms, red itchy skin or a rash. Often, people that are unaware that they have allergies, especially children, will suffer from some of these symptoms and may have a greatly increased incidence of 'colds' and asthma symptoms. If the person is separated from the animal for several days to weeks, many of these symptoms will subside only to reoccur when they come into contact with the animal again.

Are there any hypoallergenic cats?

There are no hypoallergenic cats, nor are there any cats that do not shed. All cats shed, but some have a much denser hair coat than others and shed a larger quantity of hair than those with a thin hair coat. But since the dander and not the hair is the problem, shedding is not that important in allergy control. As we mentioned earlier, many people are allergic to certain types or individual animals and not others.

People with pet allergies might want to consider getting a reptile or fish as a pet.

How can a person reduce allergic symptoms to a pet?

If you or a member of your family is part of the 15% of our population allergic to pets, there are things you can do to help keep allergic reactions under control and make your home a much more comfortable place to live. Even if you do not have allergies, these tips are helpful if you have guests in your home that are allergic to animals.

- We spend from one third to one half of our time in our bedrooms. By keeping the animals out of the bedrooms at all times, we can greatly reduce the symptoms of pet allergies.
- Install a good "HEPA" air cleaner.
- Close the ducts to the bedrooms and use electric heaters.
- Clean and vacuum regularly.
- Bathe your pet weekly.
- Do not allow your pet on the furniture.
- Do not allow your pet in your car. (Or use car seat covers when your pet is in the car.)
- Brush your pet daily and use an allergy-reducing spray such as Allerpet.

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- Keep your pet's skin healthy by feeding a high quality food and a fatty acid supplement.
- Wash your hands after handling the pet, his toys, bed, etc.
- See your physician and discuss possible immunotherapy or medications.

Summary

Telling an allergic pet owner to just not have a pet or to get rid of their own pet is not a realistic option the majority of the time. The same holds true for telling people that are allergic to animals to just avoid them. Animals and pets are a very integral part of our lives and it is impossible to avoid contact with them. By adopting some good management strategies, we can help allergic pet owners keep their pets. At the same time, even if we do not have allergies ourselves, with a little empathy and consideration on our part, we can make life much easier for our friends and relatives who suffer from allergies to our pets.

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