

## CAT-CHOO!!

**FICTION:** The only way to deal with an allergy to cats is to get rid of the cat.

**FACT:** *Many allergic cat owners are able to live comfortably with their cat by making some household and grooming changes.*

**FICTION:** Allergies to cats only get worse with time.

**FACT:** *Some people develop tolerance to their own cat over time. Children may outgrow allergies to cats.*

**FICTION:** If you have allergic symptoms (e.g. runny nose, sneezing, watery or itchy eyes) and you have a cat the cat is probably the culprit.

**FACT:** *The cat may not be the problem. Many people are allergic to seasonal pollens, molds or house dust mites. Only allergy testing can tell you for sure. If this is true for you, getting rid of your cat won't solve the problem.*

**FICTION:** My cat will be placed in a good home if I take him or her to the shelter.

**FACT:** *47% of the adult cats taken in by the Dance County Humane Society in Madison, Wisconsin are euthanized because new homes cannot be found for them.*

## THE FELINE FACTOR

The main culprit in allergies to cats is the cat allergen, *Fel D-I*, a protein found in cat saliva and skin. It is spread over the cat's fur as the cat grooms itself. **The goal is to reduce this allergen in the home.**

## HOW TO ATTACK THE PROBLEM

**If you think pets are part of your allergies, don't give up the animal right away! Find a sympathetic allergist who is willing to work with you to solve the problem.** Have an allergist conduct tests to see what you are allergic to. RAST and prick tests are more sensitive than scratch tests. This may be covered under your insurance plan.

**Symptoms of allergic rhinitis** caused by cats such as sneezing, runny nose or itchy eyes may be reduced by using some of the steps below.

**Asthma** is a less common, more serious condition, which can be life threatening, leading to chronic lung disease if not controlled. Cat lovers with cat allergy and asthma may be healthier and happier finding a new home for their cat.

**If you must give up your cat, try to find a good home for him or her.** Work with your veterinarian, he or she may know community organizations that can help.

## HOUSEHOLD HINTS

**Keep the cat out of the bedroom!** This reduces allergen levels in the room where everyone spends the most time.

**Reduce household dust and allergens:**

- \*Dust rooms frequently with a damp cloth.
- \* Damp mop the floor and baseboards. Clean walls and ceilings regularly.
- \*Carpets hold more allergens than bare floors and are harder to clean. A cleaning solution of **3% tannic acid** (available from your pharmacist) alters *Fel D-I* so that it is less allergenic and may be used on carpets or dusting.

**Let someone else do the cleaning** if you are allergic!

**Replace drapes with blinds**, which are easier to clean. Realize that **upholstered furniture will hold *Fel D-I***.

**Change filters** on furnaces and air conditioners regularly.

**Air conditioners** may help reduce outside allergens – many people are allergic to more than one thing! Room-sized, industrial strength **HEPA air filters** may also help in this regard. One in each room is recommended. Change filters regularly.

**Be aware that *Fel D-I* can remain in the home environment for many months**, even if the cat is no longer present.

## THE KITTY CONNECTION

**Weekly or monthly rinsing of some cats with water may reduce allergens.** Your veterinarian can show you the easiest way to bathe your cat- it's not as hard as you might think!

Commercial products such as Allerpet/C, applied to the cat's fur with a damp cloth, may be of benefit.

**Although no breed is completely free of *Fel D-I*, different individual cats can cause different reactions** (short haired cats can be as allergenic as long-haired cats!) **Some people can tolerate one cat and not another, and some people develop a tolerance to their own cat over time.** So don't be too quick to find a new home for your feline friend.

If you have allergic symptoms you may find that cat litter dust is irritating. Try using **low-dust cat litter or scoopable sand-type litter** (which does not need to be changed completely as often as clay-type litters). Or have someone else clean the litter box.

## PEOPLE SOLUTIONS

**Wash your hands thoroughly after handling your cat.**

**Eliminate as many other allergens** (such as house dust or pollens) **in your environment as possible.** Your symptoms may decrease to a level that allows you to tolerate living with your cat.

**Antihistamines, decongestants and nasal sprays** may help relieve symptoms and may be prescribed by your physician.

**Immunotherapy** (“allergy shots”) is an option in which low doses of cat allergens are injected weekly to help your body tolerate the allergens better. While immunotherapy has helped some cat-allergy sufferers, especially those with periodic exposure to cats, it may be less effective when exposure is continuous. In addition, it may require many months of injections and is not risk-free. Talk to your allergist.

## CONCLUSION

Our feline friends are important to us and play a key role in our emotional and physical well-being. While no one wants to jeopardize the health of a family member with cat allergies, **it may be possible to live well with your cat with a little planning.** Using one or more of these suggestions may help control your allergy symptoms and allow you to keep your devoted companion.

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## MANAGING YOUR ALLERGY TO CATS

**Are you allergic to cats?  
Would you like to  
keep your cat?**