

Pet Allergy



What is a pet allergy?

Contrary to popular belief, an animal's fur isn't what causes allergic reactions. There's a protein primarily found in the dander, or flaky skin, of the animal that can cause problems. Dander can also be found in the saliva and urine of some pets. The allergenicity varies from animal to animal:

- Cats are more allergenic than dogs because they lick their bodies to clean.
- Rodents (mice, guinea pigs, hamsters, gerbils, rabbits) don't have allergenic dander, but they do have allergenic proteins in their urine.
- Allergenicity of reptiles (snakes, turtles, chameleons) is not known.

What are the symptoms of a pet allergy?

The allergen that causes reactions is very different from animal to animal, meaning you may be allergic to dogs but not cats. Allergic individuals can experience a wide variety of symptoms. For some, they experience symptoms when the protein is inhaled, and for others, it occurs after coming in direct contact with it. A few common symptoms are:

- Itchy and watery eyes
- Sneezing or nasal congestion
- Wheezing, as a trigger of asthma
- Eczema or atopic dermatitis
- Hives

Interestingly, individuals who are allergic to more than one animal can experience different symptoms from animal to animal.

How can pet allergy be treated?

Luckily for animal lovers, pet allergy can be treated with allergy drops, similar to how other environmental allergens are treated. After skin or blood testing, your provider will determine your level of sensitivity and formulate drops specific to you.

Patients typically take drops for 3-5 years, and those who complete treatment successfully are often able to reintroduce pets into their homes safely or live comfortably with those pets who currently share their space.

For those who can't reduce exposure to animals at home or work, your provider may be able to supplement current treatment with high potency dander dosing to help reduce reactions. It's a higher concentration dose that's taken up to five times daily for 3-6 months. The goal is to build tolerance in a shorter amount of time.



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What about hypoallergenic pets?

Many allergic individuals think they can forgo allergy treatment and opt for a hypoallergenic pet instead. A simple Google search will give you lists of animals that are titled hypoallergenic, but the breeds on these lists are just known to shed less than other breeds. We know that the allergenic protein is not in the fur, so unfortunately, just because the animal doesn't shed it could still cause reactions.

There are very few truly hypoallergenic pets, and those that are can come at a high price. Select breeders in the country actually test dogs' antigen levels and breed them with other dogs that also have low production of the bothersome antigen. Then, they test the puppies' antigen level, too, to ensure that they actually have a low allergenicity.

Treating the root cause of the allergy may be more effective, as it can prevent you from reacting to all pets, not just the one you welcome in your home.

Tips for eliminating pet dander:

- Don't allow pets into your bedroom (keep it a dander free zone)
- If you are going to be exposed to an allergenic pet, take an extra red antigen drop and/or an antihistamine before exposure to prevent a reaction
- Air purifiers can be helpful in removing dander material from the air
- Bathe the animal frequently to decrease the amount of dander on the pet
- Vacuum with a HEPA filter
- Change your furnace filter often
- If possible, remove carpeting throughout the home

Beneficial products:

- Allerpet Dander Remover (or other dander remover)
- HEPA Filters
- Fish oil pills for your pet, to promote a healthy coat and less dander
- Air purifiers