

Allergic to Cats? What to Do

By Lori Jo Oswald

We've all heard of it—people who are told they are allergic to pets and so dispose of them in one way or another. But is it necessary? Perhaps your physician doesn't understand that your cat is a member of your family. Getting rid of pets "should be considered only as a last resort if other treatment methods fail," said Dr. Aaron Katcher.

Bathing Your Cat May Help

It may be as simple as bathing your cat once a month. Researchers at the University of Washington School of Medicine found that after 8 months of soapless baths, "most of the cats were producing virtually no allergens." If your cat gives you trouble during bathing, use a professional groomer. But keep up the monthly baths to keep allergens down. Cleaning furniture, rugs, and bedding also helps.

Other Tips

1. Insist on thorough testing—more than just a "scratch test."
2. Buy a high-quality air purifier.
3. Reduce mold around the house. People who are allergic to pets (actually pet dander, not the pets themselves) may also be allergic to dust, pollen, grasses, molds, air pollutants, perfumes, smoke, and even certain foods.

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4. Keep your house clean of dander, fur, and dust. Wet-dust rooms twice daily, and use a damp mop with a disinfectant on floors to prevent mold spore growth. Vacuum daily while airing out each room.
5. Give your pet a little vegetable oil to lesson the dryness of the skin (about a tablespoon weekly).
6. Groom your pet daily.
7. Use a low-dust cat litter.

Give It Time

More good news: People often build up a resistance to their own pets, Katcher said. Tell your doctor your cat is a part of your family and that you want to try methods other than eliminating him or her. Be firm, and ask for recommendations.

All Creatures Veterinary Clinic's Dr. Marion Varman said that "a lot depends on how sick people become from cats. But if it's a mild sort of thing, you can take antihistamines, vacuum frequently, or use products such as Low-Shed to reduce the amount of shedding."

Varman agreed that bathing cats can be very effective, but she suggests even more frequent baths than once a month, if you and your cat can tolerate it, and using distilled water. It might be necessary to keep your cats from a confined area, such as a bedroom, if your allergies are severe.



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