

## Pet Allergy Facts

Pets are often important members of the household, providing companionship, security and comfort to their owners. However, certain pets can sometimes cause significant problems for family members who have asthma or other allergic diseases. People with allergies to animals should not have certain types of pets. Determined pet owners can take certain precautions to minimize allergen exposure and safeguard the allergy patient's health.

- The most common household pets — fur-bearing mammals such as dogs and cats — are the most common cause of animal allergies.
- Allergic reactions to pets are caused primarily by the animal's dander (dried flakes of shed skin), saliva and urine.
- Short-haired pets are not less likely to cause allergic problems than are long-haired animals. A long-haired animal, however, can collect other allergens such as pollen, dust and mold.
- Cats are responsible for the majority of animal allergies. To reduce dander and remove dried saliva, cats should be washed once a week with plain water or a mild veterinary shampoo. This practice should begin when the cat is very young.
- Bird, gerbil, hamster and mouse droppings can also trigger allergic symptoms.
- The best types of pets for an allergic patient are pets that don't have hair or fur, shed dander or produce excrement that creates allergic problems. Tropical fish are ideal, but very large aquariums should be kept covered to reduce the amount of water vapor in the air which may increase the concentration of molds and dust mites in the house.
- Keep pets outside or limit them to a few rooms in the house to reduce exposure to pet allergens. At the very least, pets should be kept out of the allergic family member's bedroom.
- Patients with asthma or other allergic diseases should avoid hugging and kissing their pets, and should keep them out of their beds at all times.
- Central air cleaners might help remove airborne pet allergens in the home. However, certain allergens (such as those found cat dander) do not remain airborne for long.
- An allergist-immunologist should be consulted if symptoms of wheezing or shortness of breath occur after exposure to pets, or if there is a chronic or progressive feeling of breathlessness, loss of energy and fatigue.