



## Pet Allergies: Diagnosis, Treatment, Prevention

Allergies to pets with fur are common, especially among people who have other allergies or asthma.

*In the United States, as many as three in 10 people with allergies have allergic reactions to cats and dogs. Cat allergies are about twice as common as dog allergies.*

People with dog allergies may be more sensitive to some breeds of dogs than others. Some people may be allergic to all dogs.

*People may think certain breeds of dogs are "hypoallergenic," but a truly non-allergic dog or cat does not exist.*

Some people react to harmless proteins in the pet's urine, saliva or dander (dead skin cells).



## 3 Facts About Pet Allergens

### #1 – Pet allergens can collect on furniture and other surfaces.

The allergens will not lose their strength for a long time. Sometimes the allergens may remain at high levels for several months and cling to walls, furniture, clothing and other surfaces.

### #2 – Pet hair is not an allergen.

It can collect dander, urine and saliva. It also can carry other allergens like dust and pollen.

### #3 – Cat and dog allergens are everywhere.

Pet allergens are even in homes and other places that have never housed pets. This is because people can carry pet allergens on their clothing. Also, allergens can get into the air when an animal is petted or groomed.

Pet allergens can also be stirred into the air where the allergens have settled. This can happen during dusting, vacuuming or other household activities. Once airborne, the particles can stay suspended in the air for long periods.



## What Are the Symptoms of a Pet Allergy?

Cat and dog allergens can land on the membranes that line the eyes and nose. Reactions include:

- Swelling and itching of the membranes
- Stuffy nose
- Inflamed eyes

A pet scratch or lick can cause the skin area to become red. It is common to get itchy eyes after petting an animal then touching your eyes.

### Delayed Symptoms

If allergen levels are low or sensitivity is minor, symptoms may not appear until after several days of contact with the pet.

## Breathing Problems

Many airborne particles are small enough to get into the lungs. For some, this exposure can cause severe breathing problems. Highly sensitive people can begin coughing, wheezing and have shortness of breath within 15 to 30 minutes of inhaling allergens. Sometimes highly sensitive people also get an intense rash on the face, neck and upper chest.

## Asthma Attacks

Contact with a cat can trigger a severe asthma attack in up to three in ten people with asthma. Cat allergies also can lead to chronic asthma.

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### About Patrick Donahue, MD

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