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Allergic to animal hair.

If you are like many people, you may discover that you have animal allergies.

Cat or dog allergy occurs in approximately 15% of the population.

For those with asthma, the percentage jumps to 20-30%.

The allergy is an immune reaction to a protein (an allergen) found in saliva, dander (dead skin flakes) or urine of an animal.

People are not allergic to the hair of an animal, as many may believe.

Rather, the allergen gets carried in the air on very small, invisible particles.

It then lands on the lining of the eyes (conjunctiva) and nose.

It may also be inhaled directly into the lungs, which could cause allergic symptoms.

Allergen contact with an allergic person's skin -may also cause itching and hives.

Usually symptoms will occur quickly (within minutes) after being exposed to an animal.

For some people, the symptoms may build up over several hours and be most severe 12 hours after they have discontinued contact with the animal.

What do you do when you find that dogs cause you to sneeze, wheeze and itch?

Then of course dogs and cats will not be your choice to have as a pet or to be around you –simple as that.

Living with animals being allergic to the allergen of animal skin and hair need management that is if you have dogs anyway.

Keeping the offending dog out of the house will reduce exposure dramatically.

Bathing the dog weekly will reduce the amount of allergens that are given off into the environment.

You should consult with your veterinarian for advice regarding care of your dog's skin to prevent excessive dryness if you are washing your dog regularly.

Have a non-allergic family member brush your dog outside.

This will help remove loose hair and allergens from your dog and will keep down the amount that is shed indoors.

Have a non-allergic family member clean out the dogs sleeping box or cage or blanket.

While it is thought that dander and saliva are the source of allergens, urine is the source of allergens in other pets, such as cats, rabbits, hamsters and guinea pigs.

Allergens accumulate in areas such as carpeting, mattresses, cushions, and even on vertical and other horizontal surfaces of any room.

Since the allergen particles can go through fabrics, it is suggested that mattresses and cushions be encased in plastic with a zipper to prevent the release of allergens when squeezed.

Vacuuming does not help with allergy problems because it does not clean the lower levels of the rug, and in fact, stirs up small allergen particles.

Some of these particles can move right through the vacuum, but a vacuum filter may help prevent this release.

Periodic steam cleaning of wall-to-wall carpeting may be somewhat beneficial.

The best solution is to have a hardwood floor with scatter rugs that can be taken up and washed.

Replace bedding and carpeting that has animal dander in it.

It can take weeks or months for fabrics to come clean of allergens.

In some homes, animal allergens may persist for a year or more after the animal has been removed.

Studies have shown that immunotherapy will improve but not completely prevent allergic symptoms.

Dog allergen immunotherapy works better in cases where the patient has only occasional, unavoidable exposure, rather than in cases where the animal stays in the home all of the time.

If your home is super-insulated, this may not be helping your allergies. Studies show that energy-saving homes (those built with triple-glazed windows, with all cracks carefully sealed) keep allergens as well as the heat in.

One study found an allergen level 200% higher in a super-insulated home than in an ordinary home.

Home air cleaners, which are designed to reduce airborne allergens in the indoor environment, may help to eliminate some of the pet dander and other allergens in your home.

Medications can be taken to prevent symptoms if you are only exposed occasionally.

These medications may include antihistamines, decongestants and asthma medications (for the allergic asthmatic).

Adapted from information provided by the American Academy of

Asthma, Allergy, and Immunology (www.aaaai.org, August 1999).