

Cat Hair

Cat hair allergy is actually a misnomer, because the hair is not the cause of the allergy. The major protein to which cat allergic patients react to is found in cat saliva, cat dander and male cat urine. This explains why there are no truly “allergy-free” breeds – long hair, short hair, it really doesn’t matter. All cats have saliva, and all cats have the glands in their skin that produce the allergen.

Cat dander is recognized as an extremely potent allergen. The allergen is very small, so it becomes airborne very easily and quickly, which may explain why a cat-allergic person often reacts very quickly when they enter a home where a cat resides. It is also very sticky, which presents another problem. Approximately 28% of homes in the US have at least one cat present. But a study that randomly sampled US homes found cat allergen present in 70% of the homes! Cat allergen has been found in schools and office buildings as well – most likely brought in by sticking to cat owners clothing. Cat allergen is also quite stable – homes that eliminated their cat still showed cat allergen to be present six months later.

It is obvious that avoiding cat allergen is very difficult if not impossible. The cat allergen load can be reduced by taking a number of steps. Some suggestions include: have your cat neutered (production of the cat allergen is influenced by hormones); keep the cat out of the bedroom; clean your home frequently, and vacuum with a HEPA-filtered unit; wipe your cat down with a damp cloth every couple of days to minimize the amount of allergen that is shed into the home.

In addition to cat allergen reduction measures and pharmacotherapy, your physician may also incorporate immunotherapy in your treatment plan to allow you to better tolerate exposure to cats.

