



Does your cat make you sneeze?

Top tips for managing a cat allergy

**CAT
PEOPLE
of Melbourne Inc.**

Does your cat make you sneeze?

You could be allergic to your cat! Read on for tips on how to manage your allergy by:

- Reducing allergens in your home
- Reducing allergens around your cat
- Medication to manage your symptoms

What is an allergy?

Allergies occur when our immune system overreacts to a foreign substance called an allergen. Common allergens include foods like peanuts, milk, eggs or shellfish; or non-food allergens like pollens, mould spores, dust mites, medicines (such as penicillin) or animals, like your cat.

In most cases, cat allergen is a protein in a cat's saliva, urine, skin or faeces. Many people think it's the cat's fur they're allergic to. It's not. Cats lick themselves often when grooming so the protein from their saliva gets transferred to their fur. If you are allergic to a cat, your body will overreact when it comes into contact with these proteins, making you sneeze or itch.

What are the symptoms of a cat allergy?

Cat allergies typically cause nose, eye, skin and respiratory (lung and throat) symptoms.

- Nose and eye symptoms like sneezing; runny or stuffy nose; itchy or watery eyes; itchy nose, throat or roof of mouth
- Skin symptoms like dry, itchy skin; rashes or hives
- Respiratory symptoms like coughing, wheezing, tightness in your chest

In extreme cases, a severe reaction can occur, called anaphylaxis, in which the allergic individual may experience itching, hives, swelling, respiratory distress, shock, and even death.

In general, allergy symptoms will worsen when a person is exposed to higher amounts of an allergen or when several different allergens are present. Reducing exposure to allergens can reduce the severity of your symptoms.

Can I still have a cat, if I'm allergic?

There are many options for managing allergies by reducing your exposure to allergens and treating your symptoms. Many people with allergies are able to keep their cats and live long and happy lives together.

Cat People of Melbourne
support@catpeople.org.au
www.catpeople.org.au

What should I do if I think I am allergic to my cat?

Some people assume they have a cat allergy based on their symptoms. If this is you, it's important to see your doctor to discuss your symptoms and the best way to manage them. Practical tips for managing your allergy are outlined below.

Reducing allergens in your home

Reducing allergens in your home can help reduce your allergy symptoms. You can do this in a number of ways:

- Keep your cat out of your bedroom and out of your bed. Change your sheets at least weekly to minimise allergens.
- Limit your cat to a few rooms in the house, but only if this is easy to do and doesn't stress you or your cat!
- Use an air purifier with a HEPA filter, especially in your bedroom at night, but also in other areas where you spend a lot of time.
- Remove carpets or choose smooth flooring (such as wood or tiles). Carpets can contain many times more allergens than smooth floors! If you do have carpet, make sure it's vacuumed regularly with a good vacuum cleaner with a HEPA filter.
- Where possible, avoid having the person who is allergic to the cat do the cleaning. Dusting and vacuuming can stir up allergens and make your symptoms worse. If this isn't possible, wear a mask while cleaning to reduce your exposure to the allergens.



Reducing allergens around your cat

It's impossible to eliminate allergens in your cat, but you can reduce them:

- Avoid spending long periods petting your cat or having it sleep on you. If you do pet your cat, avoid touching your face and make sure you wash your hands immediately afterwards.
- Desex your cat. If you haven't already desexed your cat, now's the perfect time! Cats that have been desexed produce less allergens than cats that haven't been desexed.
- Regular brushing can help reduce allergic reactions because it lessens shedding and reduces the amount of fur floating around your home. Try to get someone who isn't allergic to the cat to do the brushing, or take your cat to a specialist cat groomer.

Cleaning the litter box regularly will also help reduce allergens, as the same proteins found in saliva, fur and dander are also found in cat urine. Again, it's best to have someone who is not allergic to cats do this. (What a great way to get out of cleaning the litter box!)

Medications can help

There are lots of anti-allergy medications available, over the counter at your local pharmacy or by prescription from your doctor. Before trying medication, you should discuss the right medication for you with your doctor or pharmacist. Some of the options include:

- **Antihistamines** - these are taken once or twice a day and help block your body's response to the allergen. They can reduce or even stop you sneezing, wheezing and itching!
- **Corticosteroid sprays** - these medications are sprayed into your nose, once or twice a day and help reduce your body's response to the allergen.
- **Asthma medication** - if your cat makes your asthma worse, you may need to review your asthma medication with your doctor.
- **Desensitisation injections** - these injections gradually introduce your body to the thing it's allergic to, and build your immunity to it. Desensitisation is a lengthy process involving monthly injections over a period of two to three years. It's a big commitment but can be worth it if you can't bear the thought of not having cats in your life! Talk to your doctor if you are interested in exploring desensitisation further.