

## DEALING WITH CAT ALLERGIES

by Fernando DeLeon

About two percent of the U.S. population is allergic to cats. If you feel silly for not wanting to "get rid of" your feline companion, don't feel alone - one third of cat-allergic people live with at least one cat in the house.

When people sneeze around cats, it's not the cat, or the hair, but two proteins (Fel d 1 and cat albumin) in the cat's saliva and dander that are the culprits. The proteins are produced in the cats salivary glands and sebaceous glands of the skin. Cats are fastidious groomers, and they have lots of dried saliva on their hair. Cat dander is five times smaller than household dust particles, so it floats in the air much longer than dust before it settles.

### Addressing the cat:

- Daily grooming will help remove loose hair and dander.
- Bathe the cat weekly - with just plain water. A study at the University of Virginia's Asthma and Allergic Diseases Center found that plain water removes 79% of allergens, compared to 44% removed by soap and water.
- Wear a dust mask or have a non-allergic person do the grooming and bathing.
- Avoid anything (excessive bathing, fleas, ear mites) that will cause your cat to have itchy, dry, or scaly skin since that is where dander comes from.

### Addressing the home:

- The single, most effective change is to replace carpeting with tile or hardwood flooring.
- Install HEPA (High Efficiency Particulate Air) filters in as many rooms as possible, starting with the bedroom.
- Have a non-allergic person do the litter box duties.
- Keep the bedroom cat-free. So you'll have a refuge from allergens.
- Vacuum the carpet with a HEPA equipped vacuum cleaner. This will reduce the allergens by up to 90% over standard vacuums.
- Wear a dust mask when vacuuming.
- The exhaust from a standard vacuum cleaner will stir up the allergens to the point that it may worsen the problem, rather than help it.
- Consider using a damp mop to "vacuum" the walls, furniture, and appliances.
- Cut back on fabrics. The cat allergens stick to porous surfaces. Synthetic fabrics attract more dander than natural fabrics.
- Treat the carpet and upholstery with an anti-allergenic dust spray to neutralize the cat dander. A 3% solution of tannic acid has been found to neutralize 93% of cat allergens. A commercial anti-allergenic spray solution is available from: [www.aller-rx.com](http://www.aller-rx.com)
- Place the bed mattress and pillowcases in plastic covers.
- Wash cat bedding weekly.
- Wash blankets and bedspreads weekly, sheets and pillowcases even more frequently to remove cat dander.
- Wash walls, ceilings, floors, moldings, light fixtures, shelves, door tops, and window tops frequently.
- Remove carpets, drapes, and overstuffed furniture from the bedroom. A study by the University of Virginia found that carpets accumulate allergens at 100 times the rate of bare

floors.

- Use bath mats in areas where you want carpet - they can be put in the washing machine as often as needed.
- Store your child's stuffed animals, dolls, etc. in plastic trash can liners to see if it helps, or replace them with washable non-allergenic ones.
- Remove other allergens at the same time ... molds, pollen, etc.
- Air out the house as often as feasible. Opening windows will allow fresh air to flush out the airborne dander. Be sure to check the pollen count so you don't just exchange cat sneezing for cedar fever.

**Addressing the allergic person:**

- Over the counter allergy remedies (decongestants, antihistamines, nasal sprays, and asthma sprays) can reduce the sensitivity and discomfort to the allergens.
- Holistic and Herbal remedies may also provide relief.
- Prescription allergy medicines - ask your doctor.
- Allergy shots from your allergist can reduce your sensitivity to cat allergens. A new and promising allergy vaccine called "Allervax-Cat" will be available around the year 2000.
- Most people with allergies can acclimate to their "own" cats over time.

**PLEASE NOTE:** This handout is a compilation of information from various Internet and magazine sources, and is not intended to replace medical treatment.

Editor's note

01/24/99      Addr. Home ... insert new first bullet - remove carpet altogether  
04/05/02      Add [www.Aller-Rx.com](http://www.Aller-Rx.com) to anti-dander treatment section