



What are allergy shots?

Allergy shots, or immunotherapy, can help to relieve symptoms, but do not cure allergies. Immunotherapy works by gradually desensitizing your body's reaction to the allergen. A small amount of the allergy-causing item is injected, causing the body to produce antibodies that protect you from the allergen. Over time, the antibodies increase, blocking the allergens from causing a reaction.

You can perform immunotherapy on yourself without allergy shots. By limiting your contact with allergens, and gradually increasing that contact, your body builds up immunity to the allergen. This ability to build up immunity to allergens is most common in children.

Studies have shown that children who are exposed to animals at a young age are significantly less likely to suffer from allergies as adults. Parents should not feel compelled to give up the family pet to prevent exposing their children to allergies.

For more information about allergies and immunotherapy, consult your doctor.

Living with Pet Allergies

Portions of the content

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The Humane Society of the United States



PACT Humane Society



P.O. Box 841
Downers Grove, IL 60515

Voicemail: (630) 375-7017



www.pacthumane.org

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Do you have allergies to pets?

You are not alone! The Humane Society of the United States estimates that about 15% of the population is allergic to cats or dogs. But approximately one-third of people who have allergies to cats live with them anyway. Are they crazy? Not necessarily! The key to living comfortably with pet allergies is understanding what causes allergies, and following a few common sense rules.

What causes allergies to pets?

Animals' skin, saliva and urine naturally contain allergens. Allergens from the skin transfer to humans when we pet them. The problem is compounded with cats, because the allergens from the saliva mix with the skin allergens when the cat grooms itself, and then become airborne when the saliva dries.



There is no such thing as a non-allergenic animal. Even hairless animals can cause allergic reactions. Some breeds of dogs with soft, constantly growing hair may be less irritating, simply because they are groomed more often. However, individuals can react differently to different animals of the same breed, so it is important to evaluate your reaction to each animal, rather than making generalizations based on breeds.

How to live with your allergies and your pets

If your allergies are not life threatening, there are a variety of things that you can do to alleviate your suffering and continue your relationship with your pet.

Follow these suggestions to create a comfortable coexistence for your allergies and your pets.

Create an "allergy free zone" in your home. Consider restricting your pet's access to your bedroom. Using a HEPA filter to clean the air will further reduce the amount of allergens in the air. Impermeable covers on the mattress and pillows can help to further reduce problems with allergens.

Remove dust and allergens from the air by using HEPA air cleaners in several rooms in your house. Avoid furnishings that attract and hold dust, such as heavy draperies and rugs. Even your vacuum cleaner with HEPA filter can help to reduce allergens in the air.

Use allergen reducing products on your pet. There are several products on the market that are designed to be sprayed onto the pet to decrease allergens. These products are available at major pet supply stores.



Bathe your pet once a week. Studies have shown that a weekly bath is even more effective than the spray on products for reducing allergens. Consult your veterinarian for bathing instructions and recommendations on which bath products are safe for use on pets.

Realize that allergies are cumulative. If you are allergic to not only pets but also dust, pollen, and cigarette smoke, your reaction becomes compounded when you are exposed to multiple sources of irritation. To achieve relief, you will need to reduce the total allergens in your environment, not just the pet allergens.

Seek medical treatment for your allergies. A variety of treatments are available, from



homeopathic remedies to antihistamines to allergy shots. Talk to your doctor about which option is right for you. Doctors often recommend that people who are allergic to their pets should give up the animals. But studies have shown that only one in five people whose doctors make that recommendation actually do give the animal up.