

Pet Allergy:

If your nose runs, your eyes water or you start sneezing and wheezing after petting or playing with a dog or cat, you likely have a pet allergy. A pet allergy can contribute to constant allergy symptoms, as exposure can occur at work, school, day care or in other indoor environments, even if a pet is not present.

Pet Allergy Symptoms:

- Sneezing
- Runny or stuffy nose
- Facial pain (from nasal congestion)
- Coughing, chest tightness, shortness of breath and wheezing
- Watery, red or itchy eyes
- Skin rash or hives

Pet Allergy Management and Treatment:

- Avoid being around dogs and cats; if you have a pet at home, take specific steps to limit exposure.
- Nasal sprays, antihistamines and bronchodilators can help relieve symptoms.
- Consider allergy shots (immunotherapy).

Cat Allergies:

Cats produce multiple allergens (proteins that can cause allergy). These allergens are found on the fur and skin and in saliva. All cats produce allergens; studies have not shown that cats can be hypoallergenic (meaning that they don't cause allergy). Homes with more than one cat have higher levels of cat allergens. Characteristics such as the length of a cat's hair, its sex and the amount of time a cat spends indoors are not associated with cat allergen levels.

Dust and pollen in a cat's coat can also cause allergy symptoms. In those cases, the allergy is to the dust or pollen, not to the cat.

Cat Allergy Management and Treatment:

Avoidance is the best way to manage a cat allergy. If you have a cat and are allergic to cats, consider removing the cat from the home.

If you have a cat but don't want to find it a new home, or if your family wants a cat even though someone in the household is allergic, here are some strategies that may help keep symptoms at bay:

Keep the cat out of your bedroom and restrict it to only a few rooms. Be advised that keeping the cat in only one room will not limit the allergens to that room.

Don't pet, hug or kiss the cat; if you do, wash your hands with soap and water.

High-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) cleaners run continuously in a bedroom or living room can reduce allergen levels over time.

Regular use of a high-efficiency vacuum cleaner or a central vacuum can reduce allergen levels.

Giving your cat a bath at least once a week can reduce airborne cat allergen.

Treatments for cat allergy vary, depending on the symptoms.

Your doctor can help determine what treatment would be best to treat your cat allergy. Nasal symptoms often are treated with steroid nasal sprays, oral antihistamines or other oral medications. Eye symptoms are often treated with antihistamine eyedrops. Respiratory or asthma symptoms can be treated with inhaled corticosteroids or bronchodilators to either prevent or relieve respiratory symptoms.

Allergy shots (immunotherapy) are an effective treatment of allergies by building tolerance over time through gradually injecting increasing doses of an allergen.

Is there an allergy-free cat?

Cats produce multiple allergens (proteins that can cause allergy). These allergens are found on the fur and skin and in saliva. All cats produce allergens; studies have not shown that cats can be hypoallergenic. Homes with more than one cat have higher levels of cat allergens. Characteristics such as the length of a cat's hair, its sex and the amount of time a cat spends indoors are not associated with cat allergen levels.

Dog Allergy:

If your nose runs or you start sneezing and wheezing after petting or playing with a dog, you may be allergic to dogs.

Dogs produce multiple allergens, or proteins that can cause allergy. These allergens are found in dog hair, dander, saliva and urine. All dogs produce allergens; studies have not shown that dogs can be hypoallergenic (not cause allergy). Dog allergen levels increase if the dog lives indoors and are higher in the rooms where a dog is allowed.

Dust and pollen in a dog's coat can also cause allergy symptoms. In those cases, the allergy is to dust or pollen, not to the dog.

Dog Allergy Management and Treatment:

- Avoidance is the best way to manage a dog allergy. If you have a dog and are allergic to dogs, consider removing the dog from the home.

If you have a dog but don't want to find it a new home, or if your family wants a dog even though someone in the household is allergic, here are some strategies that may help keep symptoms at bay:

- Keep the dog out of your bedroom and restrict it to only a few rooms. Be advised that keeping the dog in only one room will not limit the allergens to that room.
- Don't pet, hug or kiss the dog; if you do, wash your hands with soap and water.
- High-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) cleaners run continuously in a bedroom or living room can reduce allergen levels over time.
- Regular use of a high-efficiency vacuum cleaner or a central vacuum can reduce allergen levels.
- Giving your dog a bath at least once a week can reduce airborne dog allergen.
- Treatments for dog allergy vary, depending on the symptoms.

Your doctor can help determine what treatment would be best to treat your dog allergy. Nasal symptoms are often treated with steroid nasal sprays, oral antihistamines or other oral medications. Eye symptoms are often treated with antihistamine eyedrops. Respiratory or asthma symptoms can be treated with inhaled corticosteroids or bronchodilators to either prevent or relieve respiratory symptoms.

Allergy shots (immunotherapy) are an effective treatment of allergies.

Is there an allergy-free dog?

While poodles, Portuguese water dogs and a number of other breeds (including several types of terriers) have a reputation for being hypoallergenic, a truly allergy-free breed does not exist. A 2011 study compared dust samples from homes with dog breeds reported to be hypoallergenic and those of homes with other dogs. The levels of dog allergen in homes with "hypoallergenic" dogs did not differ from the levels in homes with other breeds.