

## *Pet Allergies*

*Maggie Jacobus—Feb. 18, 2002*

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Fifty million Americans have some form of regular allergy. Six to 10 million of us are allergic to cats or other pets. Yet a recent nationwide survey of 6,000 people revealed that 44 percent of people with pet allergies have kept their animal companions, enduring sneezes, sniffles and watery or itchy eyes rather than parting with their furry friend. The survey was conducted by International Communications Research and funded by Pfizer, Inc and UCB Pharma, makers of a prescription medicine to treat allergies.

Allergies, if left untreated, can develop into something more serious. “If allergies are left alone and not treated, they can become progressive, possibly even leading a person to become asthmatic, which can be life threatening,” said Dr. Gary Lewis, M.D., a Milwaukee-based holistic family practice physician.

But for many, the prospect of taking prescription medications on an ongoing basis is not a good option either. Certain drugs can cause systemic effects as well as emotional or mood changes. Some antihistamines used to control allergy symptoms can cause drowsiness; others can make you restless, nervous or anxious. The medication is masking the problem, which is not the best course of action for one’s overall health and not desirable for someone trying to lead a natural lifestyle. “If you suppress the symptoms with medication and the allergen is still there, the body is not clearing it out. It may actually be producing more toxins, which your body is already working hard to get rid of,” said Dr. Richard Horaitis, D.C. a Hubertus-based chiropractor specializing in allergies. “Your body spends more time processing stuff—chemicals—than building its immune system.”

### **What are allergies?**

An allergy is an inappropriate response by the body’s immune system to a substance that is not normally harmful. The immune system is in a hypersensitive or overactive state and has an abnormal reaction to something that is either eaten, inhaled or touched (in the case of reactions to animals, it’s classified as an airborne allergy that is inhaled). It’s abnormal because most people can eat, breathe or touch the same thing and not have a problem with it. The word allergy comes from the Greek *allos* which means *other*. It was first used in 1906 to refer to an “altered reaction” in the body’s immune system.

The job of the immune system is to identify a harmful substance such as a virus, bacteria or fungus and produce antibodies—chemicals that are made by a type of white blood cell to fight infection and other attackers. The immune system usually does a good job of discerning between threatening and non-threatening substances. The immune system of the allergic person, however, has an “altered reaction” to a harmless substance, mistaking it for something threatening and launching an attack against it.

No one is allergic immediately to an animal or other allergen. Allergies develop over time through repeated exposure. Heredity plays a role in allergies, but is not the only deciding factor. Environment has a significant impact.

Short of giving up your pet, there is no sure-fire option to get rid of animal allergies. However, there are a number of natural options that can minimize symptoms. The Outpost *Exchange* has compiled information from a number of local sources as well as reputable national web sites to provide our readers with the tools to hold pet allergies at bay.

### **Change the Environment**

There are a number of ways to minimize pet allergy contact within one's own home:

- Confine the pet to a single room or area
- Set aside a "pet-free" room or area
- Designate a certain area where allergy sufferers don't go
- Remove or replace carpeting with hard wood floors and drapes or curtains with solid blinds
- Minimize overstuffed furniture
- Vacuum regularly with a vacuum cleaner equipped with a Hepa filter
- Invest in an air purification appliance
- Don't sleep with your pets—you are inhaling the dander for eight hours! Keep the entire bedroom off limits
- Wipe down walls and flat surfaces regularly
- Get a non-allergic friend to brush the animal daily and bathe it weekly
- Use a neti pot to relieve the inflammation of nasal passages

### **Try Supplements**

"When the body starts getting burned out, things start going wrong. The body starts misinterpreting information. The immune system is breaking down and the body is in a state of fatigue," said Dr. Lewis. "You want to re-energize and rejuvenate the cells with a different message that says, 'Relax. This is not a danger to you' so your body can differentiate between allergies and real danger," Lewis said. This means addressing the health of your immune and nervous systems. Doing so can sometimes help alleviate allergy symptoms.

Recommended natural supplements include: quercetin, stinging nettle, Co-enzyme Q10, echinacea and goldenseal (taken as a short term remedy when symptoms become pronounced), garlic, calcium, magnesium, sulfur, zinc, vitamins A, C and E, beta-carotene and pantothenic acid. For more information on each of these supplements, visit [about.com](http://about.com)'s page on allergies. There is also a product called Allergy Season that combines quercetin and stinging nettle.

For children, Dr. Lewis recommends calcium (750 mg after dinner); magnesium oxide (200mg twice a day); vitamin C (250-500 mg/day); oil of walnut, flax seed or evening primrose (1 tsp 1-2 times a day) for the Omega 3 fatty oil; and pantothenic acid (100 mg 3 times a day for 1 month for children age 12 and older).

Homeopathy works on the law that "like cures like" so a remedy can be made from the animal's hair. It is recommended that you work with an experienced homeopathy practitioner.

### **Alternative Therapies**

Because allergies relate to the immune and nervous systems, alternative therapies that work to correct imbalances or deficiencies in these systems can often be effective in relieving allergy symptoms. These include chiropractic care, acupuncture/acupressure and reflexology. “If the nervous system is mis-aligned and not communicating with the rest of the body, the organs are not functioning properly and there is break down,” said Dr. Horaitis, the chiropractor. “With allergies, something in the immune system is not doing its job.” Chiropractors work to align the spine along the nervous system to “express the body’s full extent and ability,” Horaitis said. “We need to turn on the nervous system.”

“It’s not normal to have allergies,” said Milwaukee-based acupuncturist Curry Chaudoir, L.Ac. “An allergy to animal hair or dander indicates that the body’s immune system is deficient.” Using fine needles, acupuncture stimulates the nervous system to release the chemicals in the body that influence the body’s own internal regulating system. Chaudoir has had a number of patients who were receiving acupuncture for different reasons, but in the process eliminated their allergies.

When working to treat allergies—naturally or otherwise—it is important to know exactly to what you are allergic. A consultation with an experienced allergist is recommended.

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