

# MEDfacts

An Educational Health Series From National Jewish Health®



## ALLERGIES TO ANIMALS

### Facts About Allergies

The tendency to develop allergies may be inherited. If you have allergic tendencies and are exposed to certain things in your environment (allergens), you may develop allergies to some of those things. Examples of allergy symptoms include itchy eyes, runny nose, asthma symptoms, eczema and rash. The timing of the allergic response may be immediate or delayed. Allergy testing may be recommended to help identify your allergies.

### Allergies to Animals

Animal dander (dead skin that is continually shed), urine and saliva can cause an allergic reaction. Exposure to these allergens, especially breathing in particles which include dander, cause the allergic reaction to animals.

Feathered or furry animals such as cats, dogs, birds, rodents (hamsters, gerbils, mice etc.) can cause allergy symptoms. Unfortunately, there is no such thing as a "hypo-allergenic" cat or dog, and short-haired breeds are no less of a problem than animals with long hair. Exposure to other warm-blooded animals such as livestock, or to products made with feathers or down, may also cause allergy symptoms. If you do not own a feathered or furry pet, do not get one because you can develop allergies with repeated exposure.

### Environmental Control

Once an allergy has been identified, the next step is to decrease or eliminate exposure to the allergen. This is called environmental control. Evidence shows that allergy and asthma symptoms may improve over time, if the recommended environmental control changes are made. Many of the changes are for the entire home. The bedroom is the most important, because the bedroom is where people usually spend 1/3 to 1/2 of their time.

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## Steps to Control Animal Allergens

- Do not keep any furry or feathered pets in your home.
- If you must keep the pet, try to keep it outdoors.
- If the pet comes indoors make sure to keep it out of the allergic person's bedroom **at all times**.
- If you have forced air heating and a pet, close the air ducts in the allergic person's bedroom or put a filter over air vents. Keep the bedroom door closed.
- Change the furnace filter.
- Keep the pet away from fabric-covered furniture and carpet as much as possible.
- After exposure to the pet, wash your hands and change your clothes.
- Avoid visits to friends and relatives with feathered or furry pets. Ask your doctor about using a medicine as a pretreatment before you visit a home with a pet.
- Choose a pet without feathers or fur (fish, reptiles, amphibians).

Your health care provider may recommend additional medications, therapies or other environmental controls. Exposure to furry or feathered animals can make allergy, asthma and/or eczema symptoms worse in some people. To avoid these problems follow the above steps to decrease or eliminate exposure.

Note: This information is provided to you as an educational service of National Jewish. It is not meant to be a substitute for consulting with your own physician.

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