



Pets and allergies

Pet allergens are a common cause of asthma and allergy triggers.

Cats, dogs, guinea pigs, rabbits, horses, mice and rats can all trigger asthma and allergies in some people. However, avoiding pet allergens can be difficult if the source is a much-loved furry family member.

Pet allergens can trigger

Allergy symptoms:

- itchy, watery eyes
- runny nose
- skin irritation
- sneezing.

Asthma symptoms:

- cough
- wheeze
- chest tightness
- shortness of breath.



All dogs and cats have dander and secretions so all breeds/types can potentially cause allergies. However, some animals may pose less of a risk than others because:

- some breeds produce less allergen or shed less hair, which can reduce the spread of allergens
- smaller dogs generally produce less allergen than larger dogs, simply because they typically produce less saliva and have less skin
- short haired cats may pose less risk compared to long haired one.



It's not only a pet's fur that can trigger allergies, it can be their skin cells or saliva. Any pet with fur or feathers can trigger symptoms. Allergens can stick to the hair and skin of pets and become airborne when the pet sheds their hair. The allergens can remain airborne for some time.

Cats and dogs are a common source of pet allergens in the home environment. The allergens can come from the sweat glands in cats and salivary glands in dogs.



What you can do

The most effective way to reduce your exposure to pet allergens is to avoid those animals. While this can sometimes be a challenge, there are steps you can take to reduce how many allergens you come into contact with.



Tips for living with your family pet

- Always wash your hands after touching your pet.
- If appropriate, keep your pet outside, making sure they have a safe and sheltered environment with access to food and water.
- Avoid letting your pet into the bedroom.
- Wash clothes, bed linens and other laundry in hot water (above 60°C) to eliminate pet allergens.
- After resettling your pet outside, clean the house thoroughly to remove sticky allergens left behind.
- Vacuum carpets and upholstery regularly.
- Use an air purifier to help filter out pet allergens from the air.
- If you travel with your pet in the car, use washable seat covers or use a pet carrier.
- Ask someone else to groom your pet.
- Do not wash your pet more than your vet recommends.

Tips for visiting friends or relatives with pets

- Ask your friend to keep their pets safely outside or in another room while you are there.
- Remember to take your allergy medicine before visiting.
- Bring your asthma or allergy action plan and medications with you.
- Always wash your hands after touching their pet.
- Avoid touching your face before washing your hands.
- Wash your clothing in hot water (above 60°C) to remove allergens after your visit.

Important reminder

Ensure you regularly see your GP and keep your asthma and allergy action plans up to date.

Consult your GP about a referral for allergy testing if you think you have an allergy.



If symptoms persist

If allergic symptoms persist even after taking these steps, consider gradually increasing the time the pet is kept outside, making sure they have a secure area with a safe, sheltered space.

The RSPCA can provide advice on appropriate environments for outdoor pets. It may still take some months before allergen levels are reduced.

Unfortunately in some cases where symptoms persist, you may consider moving your pet permanently outdoors or re-homing the pet to another family. If you feel that you need to make this decision, please contact your local RSPCA for more advice.

Download asthma action plans



Download allergy action plans



Disclaimer: It is important to note that information contained in this fact sheet is not intended to replace professional medical advice. Any questions regarding a medical diagnosis or treatment should be directed to a medical practitioner.