

Pet Allergies



Pet allergies are most commonly to proteins found in pet hair and shed pet skin. Such allergies are common causes of allergic rhinitis (blocked runny nose, sneezing and itchy eyes) and can trigger symptoms of asthma. The best strategy is to avoid or reduce contact with trigger animals.

A blood test (RAST) can tell you if you are allergic to animals (generally a mix of the common animal allergens is used) and a skin test can differentiate which animal in particular you

are allergic to.

PREVENTIVE STRATEGIES

Families tend to become very attached to the pet so complete avoidance may be impossible. If possible, do not let your pet into the house and, certainly, do not allow your pet into the bedroom. If you keep your pet you should: bathe the pet regularly; replace carpet and soft furnishings with hard surfaces; use high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filters; ask someone not allergic to clean the pet's areas.

Even if you remove your pet immediately, fur and shed skin may be present in your house for many months. Strategies to reduce residual allergens include: careful cleaning including walls and ceilings; replace or re-upholster furniture; replace bedding and carpets; use a HEPA filter.

MEDICATIONS

Avoidance is the best treatment however medication can help when this is not possible. Your GP can advise you about treatment for asthma if this is required.

Therapies include:

- saline spray- use saline wash (see below) three times a day
- nasal cortisone spray (eg rhinocort, nasonex) 2 sprays each side daily for 6 weeks (Note that these sprays take approx 2 weeks of regular use to work and 6 weeks for maximal effect). Spray these directed toward the ear lobe on each side to avoid irritating the septum which can cause nose bleeds.
- antihistamines (try fexofenadine 180mg/ day if you prefer wakefulness in the morning or cetirizine 10mg/ day at night if you prefer light sedation) should work immediately and can be used as needed
- decongestants (sprays or tablets) should NOT be used beyond 3 days as they may cause worse nasal swelling and high blood pressure with prolonged use.

SALINE IRRIGATIONS.

Saline irrigations should ideally be performed on both sides 3x/day. Purchase a Sinus Rinse (Neilmed ®) or similar irrigating bottle that may be easily refilled from the chemist. Saline may be purchased or made at home using the following formula:

- 1 teaspoon non-iodized salt (sea salt or cooking salt)
- 1 teaspoon baking soda

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- 360mL water

Heat in microwave for 20-30 seconds (until comfortable to drip on hand).

Lean over sink or basin and gently place tip of bottle 1 cm into nostril.

While panting and tilting head over sink, instill ½ bottle into each nostril.

Gently blow nose without blocking nostrils.

Repeat if nose still feels crusted.

Wash bottle after each use with warm soapy water. Store in clean cup with tip down.

Once a week wash bottle with vinegar to prevent bacterial growth.

You may notice some dripping during the day when you tilt your head down.

Do not use saline 24 hours before a CT scan (it may cause an appearance like a sinus infection).



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