

Northwoods Humane Society – Deanna Persson, President

Our son Chris, was allergic to cats as a young child. His allergies weren't severe but we had to make some adjustments in our home. I am happy to say that at the age of 38 he is allergy free and a passionate cat owner. The following information was written by Dr. Alice Athow-Frost Veterinarian, BVM BVS MRCVS about the issue of wanting a cat but having allergies to them.

Allergies are not only unpleasant to deal with, but they're incredibly frustrating, too. Having a cat allergy means you may deal with mild sneezing and itching when around them, or if your allergies are severe, it can mean having a tight chest and difficulty breathing. In the worst cases, going into anaphylactic shock is possible.

Anyone can develop allergies at any time. So if you already have a cat in your life and you suddenly become allergic to them, there are some things you can do to live more harmoniously alongside your feline friend. If you have a very mild allergy to cats, you may be able to live harmoniously with one with the following rules in place. If you have a moderate to severe allergy to cats, it is recommended that you don't bring a cat into your house.

1. Clean. Often! If you've been living with an allergy for some time, you already know how important it is to keep your home clean. Airborne allergens, like dust and cat dander, cling to any soft material, exacerbating your allergy symptoms. Commit to vacuuming at least once a week, preferably more, if your allergies are bad. Invest in a vacuum with a HEPA filter, as some allergens are so small they'll pass through a non-HEPA filter and re-enter your air. If your cat likes to be on your bed (which we do not recommend—more on that later), wash your sheets weekly in hot water.

2. Replace Your Furnishings - Certain home furnishings, such as fabric sofas, carpets and curtains, are magnets for allergens. Even with the strictest cleaning regimen, cat dander can cling to certain furnishings in your home, worsening your symptoms. Consider replacing upholstered furniture with leather and substituting blinds for curtains. Carpet is also notorious for holding onto allergens, so consider switching out carpets and rugs for hardwood or laminate. According to the Ohio State University College of Veterinary Medicine, carpets can contain as much as 13 times more cat allergens than smooth flooring.² If you must have rugs in the home, choose those that can be tossed in the washing machine weekly to rid them of the allergens that have embedded themselves into the fibers.

3. Designate "Cat-Free" Zones - The fewer places your cat can access, the less dispersed the allergens they carry will be. We highly recommend designating several spaces in your home as cat-free zones. Your bedroom should be one of the places your cat cannot access. You spend eight hours a day in your bedroom sleeping, so the fewer allergens in your room, the better. Of course, dander can travel throughout your cat-free spaces on your clothing, but airborne cat allergen levels are much higher in rooms where the cat is physically present.

4. Spay or Neuter Your Pet - Your cat should be spayed or neutered regardless of whether you have allergies or not, as there are plenty of documented benefits. Aside from preventing unwanted litters of kittens, spaying and neutering can also have the following benefits: Less likely to spray and mark territory, less likely to roam in search of a mate, less roaming means reduced chance of road-traffic accidents and fighting with other cats, longer and healthier lifespan. Reduced risk of developing

mammary cancer. Eliminated risk of uterine or ovarian cancers (females) and testicular cancers (males). If you need more of a reason to spay/neuter your pet, doing so can also decrease allergen production and make it easier for you to live harmoniously alongside your cat.

5. Try Allergy Medication or Treatments - Over-the-counter or prescription medication can help control allergies and reduce signs. Consider allergy immunotherapy, a preventative treatment for some types of allergies. Current research is minimal, but what is currently available shows that immunotherapy for pet allergies has good prospects as a viable treatment choice in the future. The type of treatment that is right for you will depend on the severity of your signs. We highly recommend speaking with your doctor, as not all medications or treatments are right for you.

6. Consider Adopting a “Hypoallergenic” Breed - While there is no 100% “hypoallergenic” cat breed (hence the quotation marks), some breeds do produce lower levels of the proteins that can trigger allergies. These breeds may be a better fit for folks suffering from mild pet-related allergies.

7. Try allergen-addressing cat food.

8. Adopt One Cat - The fewer cats you have, the lower the concentration of allergens in the household. As tough as it is to get just one cat, adopting only one will increase your chances of living harmoniously with the allergen-producing animal.

9. Invest in an Air Purifier - Air filtration can reduce airborne allergens and provide relief for allergy sufferers. You can buy filtration systems for a single room, or if your home has an HVAC system, you can invest in a whole-house air purifier. According to the American College of Allergy, Asthma, & Immunology, it is possible to remove the allergens caused by pets by using an air purifier with a HEPA filter. These filters can remove up to 99.97% of airborne particles within a certain size range, potentially eliminating pet dander floating around in your air.

10. Bathe Your Cat Weekly - As much as cats hate baths, bathing yours may be necessary to help reduce the concentrations of allergens they produce. According to the previously cited Ohio State University study, regular baths can reduce the allergen concentration by up to 84%. Only use shampoos formulated specifically for cats.

11. Wash Your Hands. Washing your hands every time you touch your cat may seem like overkill, but it will remove the allergens from your hands and prevent unnecessary exposure to the allergens.

Dates to Save: Bingo at Powell’s – April 11, April 25 and May 9th – starting at 6 pm – best to get there early.

April 27th – Spay-Ghetti and No Balls plus Baking competition – Hayward Veterans Center