

PATIENT INFORMATION BROCHURE

PET ALLERGY

WHAT IS PET ALLERGY ?

- This is a hypersensitivity reaction to pet body proteins (called allergens) that cause symptoms in people who are prone to developing allergy.
- Their immune system which normally fights foreign substances (viruses and bacteria) makes antibodies (IgE) to these pet proteins, which cause allergic symptoms.
- Allergy is usually seen with cats and dogs, but can also develop to rats, mice, guinea pigs, rabbits, hamsters, and birds, as well as farm animals such as horses, cows, chickens, ducks and geese.
- Microscopic protein particles called allergens, are present in the animal dander. These can set off allergic symptoms when breathed into the nose and lungs or deposited in the eyes.
- The removal of a much loved pet from the home may cause major emotional upset, however refusal to remove a pet from the home of a child with severe asthma result in poor asthma control. After the removal of the pet it may take many months for the allergen levels in the home to fall sufficiently so as not to set off allergic reactions.
- Remember that pet dander may be found even in homes without these animals as it may be carried on clothing.
- Horse allergy sufferers may have severe symptoms, and even anaphylaxis.
- Immunotherapy is available for cat, dog and horse allergy.

CAT ALLERGY

- Cat allergy is the most common pet allergy and up to 40% of asthma sufferers are sensitized to cats. The major allergen in cat is a saliva protein, deposited on the fur of the cat by licking. It is shed into the air and can be deposited on walls and clothing in the home. Cat allergen may remain airborne due to its small size. If breathed in by the allergy sufferer, it may lead to an immediate allergic reaction.
- In some studies it has been shown that over 80% of asthmatic children whose home contained a cat at the time of their birth and during the first year of their life, will be sensitized to cat.
- Cat allergen can also cause allergies by being brought into homes where no cats live, or example (on clothing). This has been noted to occur quite commonly in the school classroom setting.

DOG ALLERGY

- Dogs have a number of allergy-provoking protein particles in their saliva and skin scales.
- Dog allergy is less common than cat allergy, and the longer haired breeds which carry more skin scales seem to provoke allergic reactions more frequently
- A dog's lick may set off a severe allergic response, as can breathing in the allergen particles.
- Allergic individuals should wash their hands after handling dogs if they cannot be avoided.

OTHER ANIMALS

- Secretions from rabbits, rats, mice, hamsters and guinea pigs become airborne and can be a source of allergic sensitization for children and laboratory animal workers.
- Horse and cow skin scales can be allergenic to those exposed to them.
- Birds carry allergy-provoking mites, moulds and pollen on their feathers. Budgie droppings can release proteins into the air which induce insidious lung problems and asthma.
- Tropical fish may be problematic, in that individuals can develop allergies to the ant's eggs upon which the fish feed, and moulds that may grow in the fish tank.
- The cockroach, although not a pet, is also a source of domestic animal allergic sensitization.

SYMPTOMS AND SIGNS OF PET ALLERGY?

- Sneezing, running or blocked nose
- Itchy watery and red eyes
- Asthma symptoms such as coughing and wheezing
- Worsening of atopic eczema
- Urticarial rash

DIAGNOSING PET ALLERGY

- Skin Prick Tests
- Blood Tests (Specific IgE)

For more information visit: http://www.netdoctor.co.uk/health_advice/facts/allergypets.htm