

**Project TNR**  
*NJ's Humane Solution for Feral Cats*



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## Dealing With Cat Allergies

We strongly recommend that you first confirm the presence of allergies. Some studies have shown that up to two-thirds of people, who think they have allergies, don't. They can be spending money on expensive, yet totally unnecessary, medications, or making lifestyle changes (like giving up a treasured animal companion) and still not feel better. In some cases, inappropriate treatment may be making things worse. Visit <http://www.isitallergy.com> to learn about allergy tests which can confirm the presence or absence of allergies.

If you are dealing with allergies, things to try include:

- Have your cat spayed or neutered. It has been found that the sebum produced by a cat is highest in unaltered males and lowest in altered males.
- Wash your hands immediately after you pet your cat. Try to keep your hands away from your face, particularly your eyes, until you can wash up. Depending on the severity of your allergy and the frequency of your contact with your cat, you may want to shower and change your clothing several times during the day.
- Let a non-allergic family member handle the litter box chores, as cat urine contains allergens. Also avoid deodorized litter and litter that throws dust; these may be as irritating as the cat allergens.
- Have your cat brushed regularly; daily would be ideal. A non-allergic family member can be responsible for daily grooming (outdoors) or you can take your cat to a professional groomer.
- Bathe your cat frequently. Take your cat to a groomer or have a non-allergic family member take care of bathing. Wash your cat's bedding and toys weekly, too.
- Feed your cat a well-balanced diet that includes some natural fat. Fat will make her skin less dry so there will be less shedding.
- Keep your cat out of your bedroom and off your bed at all times. Cover your mattresses, box springs, and pillows with zippered-plastic, allergy-proof cases. Purchase pillows and mattresses with non-allergic polyester filling.
- Avoid heavy carpets, curtains, or upholstered furniture that attract the sticky little allergens. If you do have carpeting, have it steam-cleaned several times a year. Wash walls, floors, and baseboards regularly. (How often depends on the severity of your allergies and on your cat.)
- Use a room air purifier containing a HEPA (High Efficiency Particulate Air) filter. This will remove some of the dander in the air.
- Use a vacuum cleaner with a HEPA filtration system. This helps pick up more of the dander from your floors, and trap it.

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The goal of Project TNR, a program of Animal Protection League of NJ, is to introduce Trap-Neuter-Return to communities as the humane, effective and cost-effective method of controlling feral cat populations. Trap-Neuter-Return is a comprehensive program that will result in lower animal control costs, fewer to no births, reduction of nuisance complaints by residents and the alleviation of public health concerns.

- Replace central heating/cooling system air filters and humidifier filters frequently. Make sure vent and furnace filters are efficient.
- Open windows and doors as much as possible and use exhaust fans to keep your home well-ventilated.
- Keep dust to a minimum. Wipe surfaces often with a damp cloth and vacuum instead of sweeping (it stirs up less dust). Store books in glass-enclosed shelving. Wear a dust mask while cleaning.
- Don't smoke. Smoking lowers your tolerance to allergens and aggravates your already-sensitive lungs.

Treat your other allergies. Few individuals are allergic only to cats. By controlling your allergies to pollens, molds and house dust, your tolerance for cats may improve significantly. People also can have varying degrees of sensitivities to different allergens. When someone is allergic to animal dander and saliva, he's probably also allergic to other substances found in and around the house. Dust, mold, mildew, pollens, flowers, trees, paint, perfume, soaps, cosmetics, and other substances can trigger allergic reactions. Whether a person has symptoms or not depends on how many of these allergens are in his environment at a particular time.

Allergies are cumulative. In other words, they build up. Every allergic person has a tolerance level above which an acute reaction takes place. This is often referred to as the "rain barrel" effect. Someone who is allergic to animals, for instance, may have no noticeable symptoms when his total exposure is below his allergy threshold (or the amount of a substance needed to produce a reaction). But collect enough other allergens in the same environment to exceed his allergy threshold limit, his "rain barrel" will overflow and symptoms will pop up. One of the most important goals in controlling allergies to cats is to minimize exposure to other allergens, such as those mentioned above, that trigger attacks.

People are not allergic to their cat per se, but to products of their cat. These include dander, hair or skin proteins, fur, saliva, blood, and even urine from rodents. By using a [special pet shampoo](http://www.achooallergy.com/petcare.asp), - <http://www.achooallergy.com/petcare.asp> - designed to reduce the airborne allergens your cat produces on a regular basis, and shampooing regularly, and by taking a few preventive measures to remove or decrease other allergens in the home, an allergy sufferer should be able to reduce many of the sensitivities to his cat.

Consult your doctor about options to control the symptoms. There are medications available such as eye drops, antihistamines, and nasal sprays that can help with itching, sneezing and inflammation. A good physician can help you with this problem and refer you to a specialist if necessary. Find out from a physician what your particular allergens are and try to reduce them in the environment. In order to determine what exactly a person is allergic to, see an allergy specialist. These allergists will perform prick, scratch, or intradermal skin tests that examine reactivity to as many as 70-80 possible allergens. If you are allergic to six things, and can get rid of three of them, you may drop below your threshold, and become symptom-free. Your physician may also be able to prescribe medications to lessen the symptoms associated with allergies or give you "allergy shots" to reduce their response to specific allergens.

While all this may seem discouraging, the good news is that some people can develop a lack of reactivity to the allergen following continued exposure (which is the reason allergy shots can work), or through allergen immunotherapy (desensitization).

### [What do I do if nothing works and I can't keep my cat?](#)

It is our hope that everyone is aware that if their health precludes keeping their loved furry family member, there are options other than shelters and the streets available as evidenced by the many rescue groups which are listed on Petfinder.com who will take a cat in under such circumstances. It is unsafe and unfair for any indoor cat to be turned out and any municipal shelter may be forced to kill cats due to lack of space. Please remember the commitment to care for your cat which you made when you decided to bring her home in the first place.