



# Cat Dander Allergen Fact Sheet

## About cat dander

Up to 60 percent of European and U.S. households contain pets, and cats and dogs are the two most popular varieties.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, allergies to cats affect 7 to 25 percent of the population.<sup>2</sup> These allergic individuals, then, are sensitized to one or more allergens that are present in cat saliva, urine, and dander. However, these allergens often stick to animal hair and dander and are easily dispersed; plus, they can become airborne and linger suspended in air.<sup>1,3</sup> Those allergic to cat allergens may experience symptoms when allergens are inhaled (either via direct or indirect contact with a cat) and when allergenic proteins are delivered via cat bite.<sup>1</sup> Regardless of hypoallergenic claims, all cats produce a key allergic protein, with males having a higher concentration.<sup>4</sup>

## Where is cat dander found?

While cat allergens are present in the animal's saliva, urine, and dander, they can become airborne and linger suspended in air for long periods.<sup>1,3</sup> Plus, they can end up in myriad environments including those with or without cats, such as schools, day-care centers, households, and transportation facilities.<sup>1</sup> These allergens also can cling to many surfaces, such as bedding, clothing, and upholstered furniture, making them ubiquitous.<sup>1,7</sup> And unfortunately, cat allergens can cause year-round symptoms and may remain in an environment for months without degrading.<sup>4</sup>



## HOW DO I KNOW IF I'M ALLERGIC?\*

Together with your symptom history, skin-prick testing or specific IgE blood testing can help determine if you are allergic to a particular allergen. If you are diagnosed with an allergy, your healthcare provider will work with you to create a management plan.

## COMMON SYMPTOMS

Symptoms of cat allergy can include:<sup>5</sup>

- Sneezing
- Runny nose
- Itchy, red, or water eyes
- Nasal congestion
- Itchy nose, mouth, or throat
- Postnasal drip
- Cough
- Facial pressure and pain
- Frequent awakening from sleep
- Swollen, blue-colored skin under eyes

If you have asthma, you may also experience symptoms such as:<sup>5</sup>

- Difficulty breathing
- Chest tightness or pain
- Audible wheezing or whistling when exhaling
- Trouble sleeping caused by shortness of breath, coughing, or wheezing

In addition, some people may also experience symptoms of allergic dermatitis after direct contact with a cat. These symptoms may include:<sup>5</sup>

- Raised red patches of skin (hives)
- Eczema
- Itchy skin

Although most pet-allergy symptoms occur within minutes of exposure, symptoms in some allergic individuals build over time and become most severe 8 to 12 hours later.<sup>6</sup>

## Are there other allergens I could be sensitized to?\*

Some people with a cat allergy may also experience symptoms when exposed to dander, saliva, and urine from other mammalian animals, such as dogs, guinea pigs, horses, pigs, chickens, sheep, goats, rabbits, and hamsters. In addition, ingestion of foods such as milk, eggs, beef, and pork (as seen in pork-cat syndrome) may also elicit symptoms. This is called cross reactivity and occurs when your body's immune system identifies the proteins, or components, in different substances as being structurally similar or biologically related, thus triggering a response.<sup>1</sup>

Knowing the proteins, or components, within each allergen that are triggering your symptoms can help guide your management plan. With that in mind, and based on your symptom history, your healthcare provider may suggest something called a specific IgE component test, which can help reveal the risk profile you belong to. Results from this test can also help your healthcare provider decide if immunotherapy may reduce your symptoms.<sup>1</sup>

## Already have your specific IgE component test results?\*

Your component test results will include the name of the components (a series of letters and numbers). Your healthcare provider will likely review the results with you, but here you'll find an at-a-glance breakdown you can use as a reference. Simply match the component names to the list below to see what they mean in terms of symptom management.<sup>1,8</sup>

### rFel d 1

- Marker for risk of severe asthma.
- Cat allergen immunotherapy may be an option.
- Indicates that symptoms may be caused specifically by cat.

### rFel d 2, rFel d 4

- Cats or other mammalian pets, e.g., dogs, horses, and mice, may cause symptoms due to cross reactivity.
- Ingestion of milk, beef, and pork (pork-cat syndrome) may elicit symptoms due to cross reactivity. Cooked milk and beef may be tolerated.
- High levels of IgE to these proteins are associated with atopic dermatitis in cat-allergic children.

### rFel d 7

- Dogs may cause symptoms due to cross reactivity.

## How do I manage my allergy?

If you are allergic to cat, your healthcare provider may recommend a plan that includes the following.<sup>1,3,5,7-9,10</sup>

### Exposure reduction

The best way to reduce exposure is to keep cats out of your home and to avoid visiting environments with cats. However, if you can't bear to give up an existing pet, the following strategies may help reduce allergen exposure.

- Prevent the cat from entering the bedroom, keep the door closed, and clean the bedroom aggressively. Also consider using a HEPA air cleaner in the bedroom.
- Remove wall-to-wall carpet and scrub the walls and woodwork. Keep surfaces throughout the home clean and uncluttered. Bare floors and walls are best.
- If you must have carpet, select one with a low pile and steam clean it frequently. Better yet, use throw rugs and wash them in hot water.
- Use a vacuum with a certified asthma and allergy friendly filter, and wear a dust mask when vacuuming.



## IS THERE A RISK FOR A SEVERE EVENT?

Sensitization to furry animals is common and a risk factor for the development of allergic rhinitis and asthma.<sup>1</sup> In fact, high levels of IgE for cat, dog, and horse allergen components are markers for severe asthma. Sensitization to all three animals at the same time is also a risk marker of severe asthma.<sup>1,8</sup> Also note that some animal bites are capable of producing anaphylaxis, but it's unusual for a cat bite to evoke this reaction.<sup>1</sup>

## How do I manage my allergy? (continued)

- Refrain from touching your eyes after handling a cat, and wash your hands immediately. Also change your clothes if possible.
- Add an air cleaner combined with a certified asthma and allergy friendly filter to central heating and air conditioning systems to help remove allergens from the air.
- Remove pillows and other items that may act as reservoirs.
- Wash the pet and pet bedding frequently.

### Symptom relief

Your healthcare provider may direct you to take one of the following medications to improve your allergy symptoms:

- Antihistamines are commonly used to reduce symptoms such as sneezing, itching, and runny nose.
- Nasal corticosteroids are used to reduce swelling in the nose and block allergic reactions.
- Decongestants can be employed to relieve stuffiness.
- Commence allergen immunotherapy as directed by your healthcare provider, with the objective to develop tolerance to cat exposure.

### Emergency plan

If you're with someone who's having an allergic reaction and shows signs of shock, act fast. Look for pale, cool, and clammy skin; a weak, rapid pulse; trouble breathing; confusion; and loss of consciousness. Do the following immediately:

- Call local emergency services.
- Ensure the person is lying down and elevate his or her legs.
- Administer epinephrine immediately for any obvious signs of a potentially severe systemic reaction.
- Check the person's pulse and breathing and administer CPR or other first-aid measures if necessary

View all references at the bottom of the online allergen fact sheets at [AllergyInsider.com](https://www.allergyinsider.com) >

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