

Allergist Vs FURminator: No Contest!

By Dr. Shelby Neely, DVM

Over the course of my 20 years of practice, I have too often received a call from a cat parent telling me that a family member has just been diagnosed with an allergy to cats and an allergist or dermatologist has told them to get rid of the cat.

I have long been bothered by that concept because I have seen many cat parents with allergies to cats learn to live very comfortably with their pets. While it is true that the most effective method of treating any allergy is avoidance, many cat parents find that method extremely objectionable.

Indeed, many cat parents with an allergy to cats do not follow their doctor's orders when told to get rid of the cat. They would rather suffer with their allergies than give up their favorite feline.

Having witnessed these allergic cat parents, as well as some of my own employees, friends and relatives, continue to live with their cats, I have come to know that there are measures an allergic cat parent can take to live happily and comfortably with their cat. This assumes, obviously, that your allergies are not life-threatening.

Why Are People Allergic to Cats?

Before understanding what measures you can take to be able to live with your cat if you have allergies to cats, it is important to understand what it is that you are allergic to. Historically, people have believed that their allergy is to the cat's hair. That myth is still common, even today.

However, that's just what it is – a myth. You could sleep on a pillow made of cat hair and never have an allergic symptom even though you are allergic to cats ...IF ...a specific protein found in cat saliva, urine, and dander (dead skin) was not on the hair. It's this protein that causes allergies to cats – NOT the cat's actual hair. That's why there are no true hypo-allergenic breeds of cats. All cats carry these proteins regardless of the length of their hair or the amount of it. Even "hairless" breeds carry this protein.

So How Can I Live With My Cat If I Am Allergic to Cats?

Many of the steps you can take to live comfortably with your cat, even if you are allergic to cats, are well known:

- (1) Keep your cat out of your bedroom.
- (2) Try to avoid hugging and kissing your cat – not easy I know, but can be very helpful.
- (3) Vacuum carpets often or, better yet, replace your carpet with tile, linoleum, or hardwood floors.
- (4) Cover upholstered furniture with couch covers or towels and sheets that can be washed regularly.
- (5) Avoid cloth curtains and blinds.
- (6) Vacuum and mop frequently and thoroughly. Use a double or micro-filter vacuum cleaner bag to decrease the amount of cat allergen present in carpeting that leaks back into the room air.
- (7) Frequently wash anything that is washable such as pillow covers, couch covers, curtains, pet beds, etc.
- (8) Use a HEPA air purifier/filter which is very helpful in trapping undesirable dander particles from the air.
- (9) If you are allergic to cats, you may very well be allergic to other things. Concentrate on treating all the causes of your allergies, not just your allergy to cats.
- (10) Over-the-counter allergy medications such as antihistamines can be useful for acute flare-ups of your allergy symptoms. Of course, check with your doctor.
- (11) An effective long-term treatment is immunotherapy (allergy shots). Be sure and find an allergist who is sympathetic to your desire to continue to live with your cat.

Although it is not the cat's hair that a cat-allergic person is allergic to, the protein found in dander, saliva, and urine clings to the cat's fur. Therefore, contact with cat hair means contact with the allergen. Being the obsessive self-groomers cats are, they are constantly depositing the protein from their saliva onto their hair as well as their skin.

Cat hair also attracts and collects mold spores, pollen and other indoor and outdoor allergens.

As your cat sheds hair into the environment, the protein from the cat's saliva, as well as any dry skin (dander), ends up on the carpet, on furniture, anywhere and everywhere in your home. The problem is amplified if your cat is shedding excessive hair or has dry skin. That's why vacuuming frequently and using air filters and all of the methods mentioned above can help with your allergy to cats. If there's less protein-contaminated hair and skin in the environment, there are fewer allergens to cause your allergic reaction.

But what if we could decrease, in fact, practically prevent the dander/protein-containing hair and dander itself from falling off the cat into the environment?

Obviously, that would be a huge help. Well, we can! Shedding less dander-holding hair and skin will mean less is present in your home.

Decrease Your Cat's Hair Loss and Reduce Your Allergic Reactions

If a person who is allergic to cats isn't allergic to cat hair, but is allergic to a protein found in dander (dead skin), saliva and urine, then decreasing the amount of that protein in the environment would, no doubt, be desirable. AND ...just as preventing hairballs by using a FURminator to deShed your cat is much better than treating the hairballs after they occur, preventing the loss of so much protein into the environment is better than trying to just rely on cleaning it up once it's already there.

How Can That Be Done?

- deShedding your cat regularly will reduce the amount of hair shed in your home and therefore reduce the level of allergens in your environment. Remember, the hair itself isn't a problem, but the saliva-contaminated hair and dander-contaminated hair IS a problem since the protein found in saliva and dander are the allergens that cause your allergic reaction.

It's preferable to have someone who doesn't have allergies brush your cat regularly—use the garage or basement or other area you don't use frequently. In my experience, the only tool to use for this is the FURminator deShedding tool, which is by far the most effective deShedder we have ever found.

- Bathe your cat every week. Studies have shown significant reductions in the amount of allergens with weekly bathing of cats. FURminator has some great SAFE and effective shampoos for cats and kittens.

SHAMPOOS by FURminator®

The shampoos made by FURminator (and manufactured in the USA) contain no parabens, artificial colors or chemical dyes, and are approved for topical use on dogs and cats over 6 weeks old. The following shampoos are available, each featuring different natural ingredients to meet your particular needs.

FURminator® Hairball Prevention Shampoo for Cats

Enriched with Omega 3 & 6 Fatty Acids, Calendula Extract, and Papaya Leaf Extract, this shampoo helps reduce excess shedding and prevent hairballs and is formulated specifically for cats.

FURminator® deShedding Ultra Premium Shampoo

Enriched with Omega 3 & 6 Fatty Acids, Calendula Extract, and Papaya Leaf Extract, this shampoo promotes healthy skin and coat to reduce pet shedding, leaving a healthy and shiny coat.

FURminator® Frequent Use Ultra Premium Shampoo

This shampoo is enriched with Cactus Flower Extract, Hydrolyzed Silk, and Yucca Schidigera Extract and is specially formulated to be used frequently, without drying out your cat's skin and coat, to help reduce airborne allergens.

FURminator® Itch Relief Ultra Premium Shampoo

If your cat also has his or her own allergies, you may want to use this shampoo, along with whatever other treatments your veterinarian prescribes. If you help your cat feel less itchy, you will decrease the increased shedding and dry skin that can come from an itchy cat that has seasonal pet allergies and skin conditions. Enriched with Calendula Extract, Chamomile and Almond Oil, this shampoo calms the itch of allergies, dry skin, and hot spots, moisturizes and conditions sensitive skin, and leaves the skin feeling rejuvenated and itch-free.

Ultra Premium Conditioner

When you bathe your cat, rinse out the shampoo and follow with FURminator's Ultra Premium Conditioner. It is enriched with Omega 3 & 6 Fatty Acids, Chamomile Extract and Aloe Vera, and further helps to reduce excessive shedding by releasing the undercoat.

What If My Cat Absolutely Will Not Let Me Bathe Him?

For many cat parents, the idea of bathing a cat is overwhelming, despite how desperate one may be to reduce their allergic reactions to cats. For those owners, FURminator has created a line of waterless sprays with similar features and ingredients.

FURminator® Hairball Prevention Waterless Spray for Cats

Enriched with Omega 3 & 6 Fatty Acids and Safflower Seed Oil, this waterless spray is formulated specifically for cats to help reduce shedding and prevent hairballs.

FURminator® My FURst™ Waterless Kitten Shampoo

Enriched with Kava Extract and Aloe Vera, this waterless spray is safe and gentle for use on a kitten's delicate skin and leaves your kitten smelling fresh and clean.

Creating the Ultimate Cat Allergen Reduction Plan

(1) Bathing and conditioning your cat's hair and skin on a weekly basis can reduce the level of allergy-causing dander (shed old skin cells) and protein-contaminated hair in your environment. Cats can get used to being bathed, but it's critical to only use products labeled for them. Be especially careful, if you are bathing a kitten, that you use a shampoo safe for kittens.

(2) After your cat is completely dry from the bath, deShedding with a FURminator tool is recommended to help remove any undercoat not released during the bath.

(3) It is also helpful, and healthy for your cat, to feed him a well-balanced diet, rich in omega fatty acids, which can further help keep a cat's skin and coat healthy. The proper diet can prevent dry skin and reduce the amount of dander and hair shed into the environment.

In addition, follow the 11 suggestions at the beginning of the article for maximum success.

While it may seem like a lot of work, there are many ways to help reduce your allergies to cats. And remember, whatever tools you are able to implement will help your situation significantly, even if you can't do everything. Even bathing your cat once monthly, brushing and deShedding with a FURminator tool several times a week, and/or changing your cat's diet will help reduce the cat-related allergens in your home to a degree, and depending on the severity of your cat allergy, can provide some relief from your symptoms.

Cat lovers, don't despair! Before you let your allergist win the "get rid of the cat" battle, try some of the many great options available to help reduce the degree of cat allergens in your environment so you and your cat can live happily and comfortably together.