

## Why We Wrote This Brochure

Allergies are among the top reasons given by pet owners when relinquishing their cats or dogs to animal shelters. The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) believes that, with the exception of those who are extremely sensitive to animal dander, most people who love their pets can sensibly live with their allergies and be spared the heartbreak of giving up their beloved companions by following the advice in this brochure. We understand that for many people pets are often more important for their quality of life than the complete elimination of allergy symptoms.

Unfortunately, it isn't uncommon for people to think or be told that they must give up their pets regardless of whether their symptoms are simply annoying or truly life threatening. With the exception of people who are severely sensitive to pets—who according to many studies seem to be in the minority—pet owners can sensibly live with their pet allergies, symptoms can be managed, and pets can stay in their homes.

Common recommendations, such as keeping pets outdoors, are only partial

solutions since the yard may have even higher concentrations of animal allergens. Responsible pet owners know that pets who live outdoors are exposed to many risks, which in turn may expose their owners to potential dangers. In addition, it's unfair to a pet, particularly one who has spent the majority of his or her life indoors, to be made to live outside, deprived of human companionship.

## The Benefits of Pet Companionship

The benefits of animal companionship to humans have long been recognized by pet owners and recently by the medical community. Studies have shown that having a pet increases survival rates in groups of patients who have suffered from cardiac arrest and that blood pressure and triglyceride and cholesterol levels are decreased. The increased physical activity that accompanies pet ownership—providing exercise, visiting the veterinarian, grooming, and affectionately stroking a pet—strengthens the heart, improves blood



circulation, and slows the loss of bone tissue. Several recent studies also suggest that children exposed to pets at a young age are less likely to develop allergies to pets if their mothers aren't asthmatic.

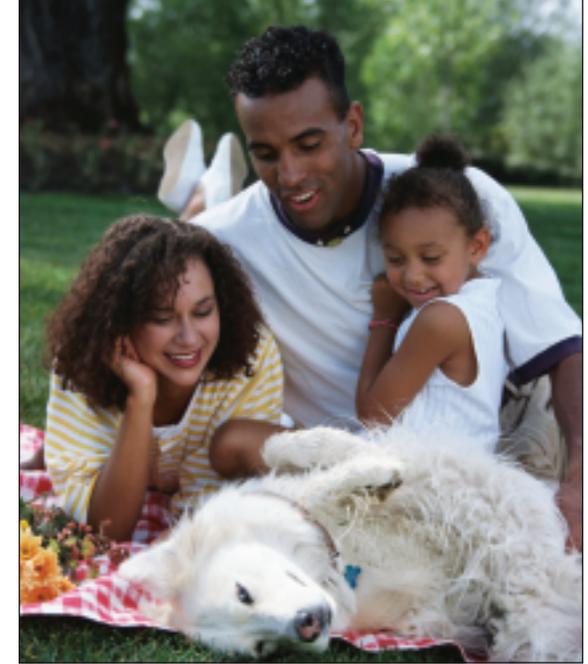
Companion animals are also good for our emotional health. The companionship that a pet offers promotes a feeling of well-being, and caring for a companion animal provides purpose and fulfillment and lessens feelings of loneliness and depression in all age groups. Having a warm and loving relationship with an animal friend can enhance one's quality of life, and people who are happier usually don't become ill as often as those who are tense and stressed.

Studies show that only one out of five people with allergies gave up their cats or dogs when advised to do so by their physicians. And many allergic pet owners adopt new pets throughout their lives. However, living comfortably and safely with a pet, despite being allergic, requires a good understanding of the allergic condition and adherence to a few rules.

## The Facts about Allergies

Glands in the animal's skin secrete tiny allergy-triggering proteins, called allergens, that linger in the animal's fur but also float easily in the air. Allergens are present in the animal's saliva and urine and may become airborne when saliva dries on the fur. The severity of reaction to these allergens varies from one person to the next, ranging from mild sniffing and sneezing to life-threatening asthma, and can be complicated by simultaneous allergies to other irritants in the environment.

All cats and dogs are allergenic (allergy causing) to people who are allergic to animals. Cats tend to be more allergenic than dogs for allergic people, although some people are more sensitive to dogs than cats.



Contrary to popular belief, there are no nonallergenic breeds of dogs or cats; even hairless breeds may be highly allergenic.

Though common, pet allergies shouldn't be taken lightly. If you don't currently have a pet but are considering one and know you're allergic, be sure to consider whether you can live with the allergy *before* bringing a new pet home. Except in the case of children, few allergy sufferers become accustomed to pets to whom they are allergic. Too many allergic owners adopt pets without thinking through the difficulties they may encounter. And too often they end up relinquishing pets, a decision that's difficult for the owner and may be life threatening for the pet.

## Are You Sure It's Your Pet?

Asthma is a chronic illness and can be life threatening. If you think you have asthma or allergies, see your physician.

However, don't be quick to blame the family pet for allergies. Ask your allergist to specifically test for allergies to pet dander rather than making an assumption. And understand that allergies are cumulative. Many allergy sufferers are sensitive to more than one allergen. So if you're allergic to dust, insecticides, pollen, cigarette smoke, and cat dander, you'll need to reduce the overall allergen level in your environment by concentrating on all of the causes, not just the pet allergy.

## Sensible Solutions to Help You Keep Your Pet



Take heart! It may not be necessary to part with your beloved pet. If your allergist has done skin and blood tests to determine your sensitivity to animals and your allergies—while miserable—are not life threatening, a combination of approaches—medical control of symptoms, good housecleaning methods, and immunotherapy—is most likely to succeed in alleviating allergies. An allergist who understands your commitment to keeping

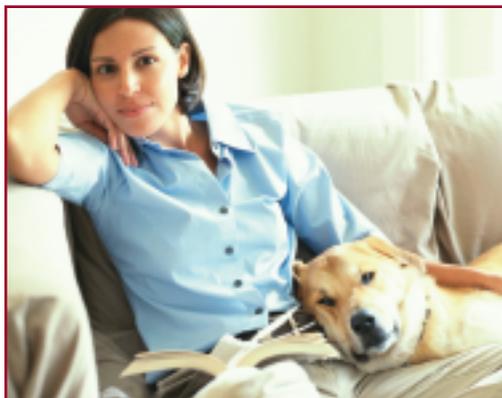
your pet will discuss sensible ways to reduce your symptoms, such as:

- Create an allergy-free area—preferably the bedrooms—and strictly prohibit the pet's access to them
- Wash your hands after touching your pet and before touching your eyes or face
- Vacuum daily to get rid of shedded fur; wear a dust mask to vacuum, and use a vacuum with a high efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter
- Use furnace filters that trap pet dander and change them regularly to maximize efficiency
- Discuss household changes and symptom-relieving medications with your allergist
- Discuss treatments for your pet that may reduce your allergic reaction with your veterinarian
- Use impermeable covers for mattresses and pillows to prevent allergen particles brought into the room on clothes and other objects from penetrating and accumulating in them
- Replace heavy curtains and drapes with fabrics you can wash regularly

## Life-Threatening Pet Allergies

Keeping both pets and people safe and healthy is very important to The HSUS. If your allergies are life threatening and you decide to find a new responsible home for your pet, find out how at [www.hsus.org/pets](http://www.hsus.org/pets). Although it can take up to six months to completely eliminate allergens in a home where a pet has lived, replacing carpeting, furniture, and drapes and cleaning walls may help reduce the dander level more quickly.

We applaud your efforts to keep you *and* your pet safe. Good luck reducing your allergy symptoms!



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Pets for Life

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*Promoting  
the Protection  
of All Animals*

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to keep  
pets and  
their people  
together

# Your & Your Pet



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