Animal Dander

This information can help you learn how to reduce your contact with animal allergens that trigger your allergy symptoms. The best form of allergy treatment is avoidance, and many patients experience a reduction in symptoms by making simple changes in their environment.

**What is animal dander?**
Animal dander is NOT the hair or fur of an animal. Dander is the old skin scales which are constantly being shed by the animal. Older animals produce more dander than younger animals because their skin is drier. Animal dander is extremely light weight and minute in size (approximately 2.5 microns and 1 micron = 1/25,000in.), and can stay airborne for hours. Animal allergens are a major component of house dust.

**Is Animal Dander the Only Source of Animal Allergens?**
No. Animal serum, saliva, urine, excrement, and sebaceous secretions all contain proteins that may be allergenic.

**How Does Animal Dander Become Airborne?**
During grooming allergens from the sebaceous glands are mixed with the animal’s saliva on its coat or feathers. When this mixture dries, it flakes off and is released into the air. Even animals that require humans to groom them may be allergenic, and during grooming the offending proteins are released into the environment. Also, as a living space is cleaned, sweeping and dusting stir up dander and other allergens from surfaces putting them in the surrounding air.

**Why Do I Have Symptoms Even When I Am Not Near an Animal?**
Animal dander can be transported easily on the air, other animals, people and clothing. In particular, cat dander is extremely allergenic. It sticks to clothing and personal belongings, and is easily transported. This is why cat dander has been found in schools and offices where an animal has never lived. Its ability to remain airborne and to permeate every area of a house makes it extremely hard to control.

**Can Birds Produce Dander?**
Yes. Allergenic proteins may be found in bird serum, droppings, skin scales and feathers. Also, birds produce a feather dust which can cause allergic reactions. The larger the bird, the more allergen is produced. There are products available that can be sprayed on birds to reduce feather dust.

**What About Rabbits, Guinea Pigs or Farm Animals?**
Any furred or feathered animal is a potential source of animal allergens. The dander, saliva and urine contain the proteins that cause reactions.

**How Do I Reduce My Exposure to Animal Dander?**
1. Remove the pet from the house and then clean all surfaces thoroughly with a damp cloth or mop. A single cleansing is not effective, but over time and several thorough cleanings of the living space and its contents animal allergens may be controlled.

2. Use a vacuum cleaner with a high efficiency air filter to trap the tiny particles of animal allergen. Water vacuums are not effective on animal dander. Studies have shown they actually increase dander levels when in use.

3. Bathe the animal weekly. Products with the ability to decrease the amount of animal dander in settled dust by nearly 50% are available through allergy product and pet supply sources. Products are available for cats, dogs, and birds.

4. If the animal cannot be removed from the house, keep it out of your bedroom.

5. Use a room air purifier in your bedroom to remove airborne animal dander.

6. Wear a mask when grooming your animal.

7. Keep clothing worn when interacting with the animal out of your bedroom.