



# Respiratory Care WA

Asthma | COPD | Respiratory Health



08 9289 3600



36 Ord Street, West Perth, WA, 6005



[respiratorycarewa.org.au](http://respiratorycarewa.org.au)

## Pets and Asthma

Many families choose a cat or dog for their family pet. However, these animals can be a trigger for some people with asthma. In general, cats produce more severe allergic reactions than dogs. Other pets, such as birds, rabbits, hamsters, guinea pigs, rats and mice, carry allergens which could trigger your asthma.

Allergens are found in the pet's saliva, hair, urine and dander (dead skin flakes). These allergens are carried in the air on very small particles which you cannot see. The pet's dander, which is shed on the carpet and upholstery, is also a food source for the dust mite.

Symptoms may occur within minutes of being exposed to the pet. For some people however, symptoms may build up over several hours and be most severe 12 hours after initial contact with the pet. For some people, this may be life threatening. If a pet comes inside, its shedding becomes part of the house dust and are present even when the animal is outside. In this circumstance, it may be difficult to recognise that you are allergic to the animal. So, what do you do when your furry friend causes you to cough and wheeze?

The ideal solution is to remove the pet from the home and, wherever possible, avoid contact with other pets or the homes they inhabit. Although keeping a furry pet is discouraged if asthma is triggered by it, there are ways to minimise your exposure to its allergens.

### Managing your pet

- Have the pet live outside the house. Providing them with a kennel or hutch will help to make them comfortable and safe. Birds should be kept in an outside aviary away from the house
- If the pet does happen to wander inside, ensure it is kept out of the bedroom. Many hours are spent in this room sleeping, and keeping the pet out will reduce your exposure significantly. Try to keep the pet out of any other rooms in which you spend a great deal of time. Remember, any visit from your pet will leave allergens behind
- Ask a non-allergic friend or family member to brush your pet outside. This will remove any loose hair from your pet, reducing the amount shed indoors. The animals litter box or cage should be cleaned out regularly. Again, this is a task for a non-allergic person. Urine is the source of allergens in pets such as rabbits, hamsters, guinea pigs, rats and mice
- Washing the cat or dog weekly will significantly reduce the amount of allergen that is released into the environment. Consult your veterinarian for advice regarding the pet's skin care to prevent excessive dryness due to frequent washing



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- The allergen accumulates in areas such as carpets, mattresses, cushions and on vertical and horizontal surfaces. The allergen particle is so small, that it can pass through fabrics, so it is suggested that mattresses and cushions be covered with specific protectors to prevent the release of allergens when squeezed
- Have the pet sit on a washable sheet which should be changed and washed daily
- Vacuuming has little effect on these allergens, as it does not reach the lower levels of the carpet where the tiny particles settle, or it may disturb the small allergen particles, causing them to become airborne. Using a vacuum cleaner with a triple filter system may help. This will prevent the release of the allergen, but the best solution is to have polished floors, or floor coverings such as lino or tiles
- Bedding and carpeting that has animal dander in it should be replaced. It can take weeks or even months for some fabrics to be free of allergens
- Air filter systems are of minimal benefit

The best pets for an allergic person include turtles, hermit crabs, fish or reptiles.