

Springtime Means Allergy Time

Animal welfare organization offers tips on how to combat pet allergies.

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As winter's bitter cold slowly gives way to springtime, pet lovers might notice a tickle in their noses. While spring is synonymous with rebirth and renewal, it's also known as allergy season.

"Many who suffer from allergies are unable to appreciate the joys of springtime because their allergy symptoms become a real annoyance," said Steven Hansen, senior vice president of the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals' (ASPCA) Poison Control Center.

"These symptoms of sneezing and itchy, watery eyes can become especially problematic for pet owners, but by taking some simple precautions, surviving allergy season with your animal companions should be much easier," Hansen said.

Some ways animal lovers can make this spring allergy season a smooth one include:

If you're unsure as to whether your family members have allergies, have them spend time in the home of pet-owning friends before bringing home a cat. "If you suspect that you or a member of your family has allergies, take them to a specialist who will determine the exact cause of your symptoms and help alleviate your symptoms," Hansen said. "If a family member does in fact have allergies, it doesn't necessarily mean you cannot have a pet." Medications and de-sensitizing shots can sometimes help, Hansen said.

Consider creating an allergen-free room. A bedroom is often the most practical choice. By preventing a pet from entering this room, you can ensure freedom from pet allergies.

Limit fabrics in your home. Allergens collect in rugs, drapes and upholstery, so if you choose to keep some fabrics as part of your décor, steam-clean them regularly. Cotton-covered furniture is a good choice and washable blinds or shades make good window treatments, according to the Poison Control Center.

Keep your home clean. Clean litterboxes frequently and use a low-dust, perfume-free litter. Clumping litters are a good choice, Hansen said. Dusting around the house regularly and wiping down the walls also can cut down on pet allergies. Vacuum frequently and use a vacuum equipped with a filter or a disposable electrostatic bag that will keep allergens locked into the vacuum. "Washable pet bedding and cages are also a smart option. They can be cleaned often and easily, making it simple to keep allergens from accumulating," Hansen said. An air purifier fitted with a filter also can help keep pet allergies at bay. In addition, anti-allergen room sprays can deactivate allergens, rendering them harmless. Ask your allergist for a product recommendation.

Keep your pet clean. Brush or comb your cat frequently, particularly while outdoors, to help combat pet allergies.