

Gesundheit!

Environmental and medical management may allow some allergic people to still have cats.

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5. Medication is an option that has improved in recent years. The newer, non-sedating antihistamines allow for more consistent usage and greater safety, as do the new nasal sprays that specifically target cells of the immune system. Talk to your physician about your options.

6. Immunotherapy may also be an option. With immunotherapy, small amounts of an antigenic substance are injected into a person. This stimulates the production of an immune response that competes with the allergic response, bringing about tolerance. There is some risk to immunotherapy, so discuss whether you are a candidate for this with your doctor.

"I started on allergy shots," Gillis said. "I started taking a non-sedating antihistamine and started living with Molly, my new kitten. And I guess I just became desensitized to her after a while. In the past three years, I have never had a major allergy attack because of her, or my other two kitties. I still get allergy shots, for cats as well as dust, mold, trees, grasses, etc, and I do have a HEPA vacuum cleaner."

7. The last important tip is compromise and creative problem solving. "My husband is the one with cat allergies, said Peggy Kendler of Monroe, Conn. "When we met, I had a bunch of cats and he knew that if it came down to it, it would either be the cats or him. So we set up a cat place in the walkout basement of our house. My husband built an outdoor cat "pen," and our six kitties can roam around in it during the day when the weather's good. It's helped his allergies to have the cats spend time outdoors. We have used a combination of filters upstairs and downstairs and my husband uses some drugs, to deal with the respiratory problems the cats cause." Severe Allergies and Asthma If the presence of a cat is causing serious illness and puts a family member at risk, keeping the cat is not recommended. "I had to find a new home for my cat and it was one of the most difficult decisions I have ever made," said Sarah McCord, a lifelong asthmatic from Pullman, Wash. "Imagine being smothered with a pillow from the inside out - then you have a sense of what an asthma attack feels like. I was on dangerously high levels of five medications and would still wake up at night so starved for oxygen that my lips were turning blue. I'm happy to report that her new family absolutely adores her. I still miss my friend, but I am so much healthier now."

"Once a person's life is in danger from a severe allergic reaction, the cat's situation becomes secondary," Weigner said.