

# Garston Animal Rescue

## Allergies: Pet allergens and dust mites

**This leaflet is not intended in any way to give medical advice. It is simply suggestions from our experience on how to manage pet allergens and dust mites.**

**It is important to be sure that your allergy is to pet allergens and not dust mites so that you apply the most appropriate strategies. Visit your GP for advice on a skin prick test to establish the exact cause of your allergy.**

### Advice

Restrict the areas of your house in which pet can go, for example, if it is a child who shows symptoms of an allergy then keep the pet out of the child's bedroom.

Groom your pet outside as regularly as possible to loosen pet hairs. Encourage your child to stroke the pet outside in the fresh air, if it is your child who is suffering from allergies.

Always wash your hands with anti-bacterial wash after touching your pet and avoid touching your face or eyes.

Regularly wash your pet's bedding. Wash pet dishes and litter trays daily. Keep the garden and litter tray free of faeces by scooping regularly.

Consider setting up an outside home for your cat. Not ideal of course but often better than traumatising your cat by moving him/her on to a rescue. You could buy or make a shelter to have outside your back door so at least the cat is kept warm, dry and fed. We suggest this due to the background you may be unaware of - **which is that 1000s of healthy cats are routinely destroyed in the UK due to lack of homes.** If you get rid of your cat then this takes up space in an animal rescue which could otherwise have been used to take in a cat living on the streets with no food or shelter, and thus vulnerable to rain and miserable weather, and exposed to thugs and dogs. At least if you provide a shelter in your yard or garden then the cat gets to stay with the family it loves.



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Remember, animal rescues have very limited resources, and often have no space at all in their sanctuaries. There is no guarantee that a suitable home will be found. Even if your pet is restricted in your home, it is often better than being uprooted from the family it has come to know and love compared with the existence in a rescue, possibly with no prospect of a new home.

Consider if the problem could be caused by fleas. Ensure you have sought veterinary advice on treating your pets for fleas, and also ask your vet's advice on a suitable household flea spray. We always recommend you go to a vet rather than a pet shop for this advice, as vets are the experts.

Keep kitchen area as hygienic as possible by wiping down surfaces with damp cloth and by washing cupboard areas to remove any pet hairs. Keep floors vacuumed and mopped regularly. When vacuuming, ensure you use a damp cloth to wipe the edges of the carpet. Consider investing in a bagless vacuum cleaner. Wipe down settee and all fabrics where dust and hairs collect

Keep house as dust-free as possible. A poorly ventilated bedroom is a perfect breeding ground for the house dust mite. Mattresses may contain up to 2 million house dust mites. The house dust mite allergen is a major trigger of asthma attacks. The Healthy Homes Program explains that, *'Humid environments create mould and increase the number of dust mites which can lead to rhinitis, conjunctivitis, eczema, coughs, wheezes and asthma.'* They advise that you, *'Ensure your home is well ventilated. Open windows or use extractor fans during cooking or bathing. Do not dry clothes on radiators.'*

Open windows as much as possible to air rooms: at least once a week while you are in, open up your windows for a couple of hours. Fresh air circulating helps to expel toxins held in carpets, cleaning products, paint and cigarette smoke. Remember, it may not be pet hairs, which are the cause of the problem. It could be dust and dust mites.

Airborne pollutants such as cigarette smoke, carbon dioxide and carbon monoxide from gas appliances can build up in your home, increasing indoor pollution. Ensure your gas appliances are checked and avoid smoking inside the house.



Reduce or stop using commercial air fresheners: these contain toxins and often the chemical smell of them is far worse than the smell you are trying to mask. Many household-cleaning items can cause headaches, nausea and a running nose, and may even be the cause of the allergic reaction. Consider instead using essential oil, eg

lavender or tea tree, or diluted vinegar for cleaning. (Books are available on the tried and tested products used by our great-grandmothers.)

Consider buying pillows, etc. that are designed for people who are allergic to dust mites.

Ideally, reduce gradually the amount of items in your house which hold dust and pet hairs, eg carpets, and consider having stripped floorboards for at least some of the rooms. This has the added benefit of making the room much easier to keep clean and fresh.