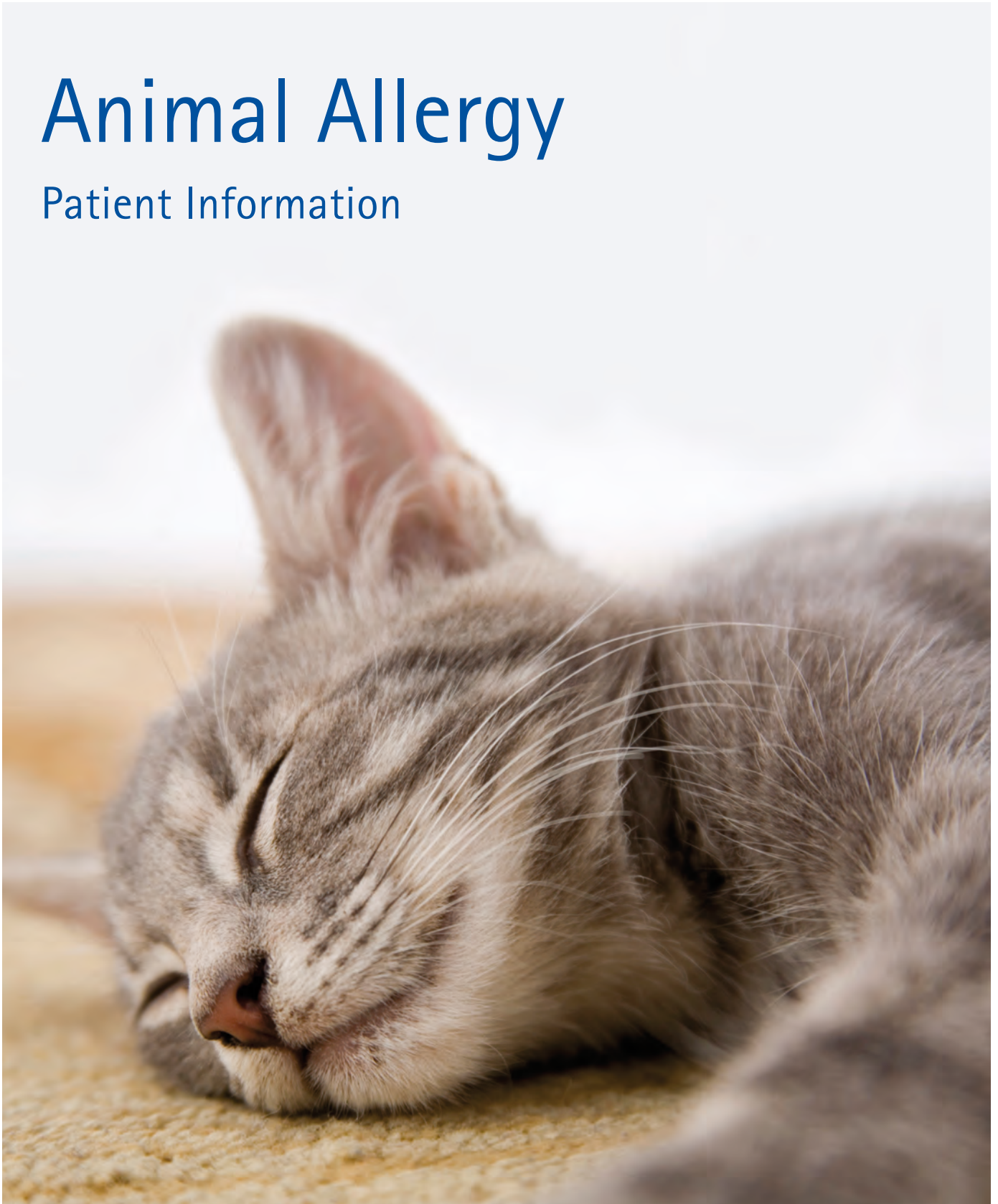


# Animal Allergy

Patient Information



# Animal allergy

An allergy is a condition which manifests as an exaggerated defence reaction of the body to allergens. An allergy against animals is suspected when after even indirect contact with animals or animal products (furs, hides, wool etc.) the following disease symptoms appear:

Nose:	Sneezing attacks, running nose, mucosal swelling (stuffy nose, difficulty breathing) = rhinitis
Eyes:	Itching, redness, watering, swelling = conjunctivitis
Airways:	Cough, phlegm = bronchitis, acute shortness of breath, asthma
Skin:	Itching, rash (eczema, nettle rash, neurodermitis)
Gastrointestinal tract:	Flatulence, nausea, diarrhoea, vomiting and abdominal pain
Head:	Migraine

The suspected "animal allergy" is verified or excluded by the results of skin, blood and/or challenge tests.

Allergens that induce animal allergies are found a.o. on animal hair, skin flakes, feathers, saliva, and urine. Most common are allergies to animals typically kept as pets such as cat, dog, guinea pig, birds but also horses and cattle. Allergies to animals we are only rarely in contact with, i.e. dromedaries, elephants or bats have been reported. Generally, allergic reactions are possible to all animals with furs or feathers when you have such an allergy disposition. Contact with animal allergens may occur by directly touching the animal or indirectly by inhalation of allergen-containing dust. Often, the contact with textiles in the broadest sense (clothing, upholstery, fabrics, mattresses, carpets etc.) may be sufficient because animal allergens tend to adhere to such textiles for a long time.

Depending on your degree of allergy disposition and the aggressiveness of the allergene you may experience a wide variety of complaints including mild symptoms (i.e. itching) and most severe symptoms (asthma). Severe allergies may develop within a few months.

The aggressiveness of animal allergies depends on the animal species. In general, hamsters, guinea pigs, rats, mice, pet rabbits, and cats are more potent allergen sources than dogs, birds, horses or cattle.

However, different breeds of the same animal species (i.e. dogs) exhibit different allergenic potencies. Most reports concern allergies against boxers, schnauzers, dachshunds, and poodles. Thus, the allergenic potency of dog breeds does not depend on the length of the particular dog's hair. In contrary, the breed is irrelevant in cats. There are also no discernible differences of longhair and shorthair cats. However, male cats are more potent allergen sources than female cats.

## Measures for the prevention and treatment of animal allergies:

### 1. Avoidance/sanitation

- Avert/avoid direct contact with animals: separation from an allergy-inducing pet animal is a sad but absolutely necessary step in most cases.
- Sanitation of animal hair/allergen contaminations in the household: Cleaning, airing, and vacuum-cleaning at regular intervals. Also bear in mind the sanitation of animal hides, animal hair carpets, coat linings, fur-made stuffed animals. It may take several months until the symptoms start to resolve, because animal allergens can remain in dust and textiles for a long time. Thus, cleaning the flat one time only is not sufficient in most cases. Cat hair for instance may even adhere to the walls.

- When direct or indirect animal or allergen contact is inevitable, have effective medication ready. You may even take the medication as a preventive measure.
- High loads of cat and dog allergens in particular have to be reckoned with even in "public" areas. High levels of cat allergens are frequently found in school buildings, public transport means or public buildings, because these allergens are disseminated via cloths.
- Replace eiderdowns by synthetic materials. Do not use a horsehair mattress.
- You should not acquire a "replacement" pet. Generally, it is merely a matter of time until you develop an allergy for this new pet.
- Due to so-called cross-reactivity, some people affected by animal allergies may react allergic to certain animal species they had never been in contact before.



Examples:

Dog ↔ Cat  
 Dog ↔ Horse  
 Cat ↔ Horse

- Feathers of a large variety of birds, i.e. budgerigar, dove, parakeet, fancy finch, canary, chicken, goose, duck or parrot, are cross-reactive. Furthermore, people who react allergic to cat hair may also not tolerate pork meat.
- Avoid irritants such as fog, smog or ozone.
- Allergy sufferers should abstain from smoking.

## 2. Treatment of complaints (symptomatic therapy)

Depending on the location, form and intensity of the symptoms, appropriate anti-allergic medications (e.g. antihistamines, corticosteroids) are given as an acute immediate measure. This eliminates, alleviates or suppresses the symptoms caused by the allergy, but only as long as the medication is being used.

## 3. Treatment with specific immunotherapy

- The aim of specific immunotherapy (hyposensitization) is to build up the body's allergen tolerance through regular administration of the allergy-inducing substances.
- This treatment is the only means of influencing the immune system, whose reactions have been altered by the allergy. It thus gets to the root cause of the disease and results in regression/reduction of the symptoms.
- Specific immunotherapy should be initiated as early as possible in the course of the disease.
- Treatment involves preparations (in the form of injections or drops) which are specifically designed to target the allergens making ill. Therapy is ongoing and takes at least three years.
- Animal allergies should be taken seriously, as the so-called "allergic march" (progression of rhinitis to asthma) may occur during the course of the illness.

**Anyway, you should absolutely avoid the contact with/ company of animals!**

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