

We have also heard that if you wipe the cat with a fabric softener sheet this will help to prevent the dander from escaping into the air.

# ALLERGIES AND YOUR CAT: DOES WATER MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

by Carolyn Ross Tomlin

According to a recent study at Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis, soaking your cat may help your allergies. This is good news for cat owners who sneeze at the sight of their pets. In fact, there may be a solution to keeping your cat without the bother of allergies.

At first, allergist H. James Wedner, M.D., and his co-workers started testing the ability of several drugs to reduce Fel D1 in cats. Fel D1 has been identified as the major culprit of a person's allergic reaction to cats. But the medications given the felines didn't work. However, a monthly 10 minute soak in lukewarm distilled water proved effective. The researchers reported that several baths may be necessary before improvements are noticed. Results aren't instantaneous.

Dr. Ralph Johnson, a veterinarian from Johnson, Tennessee, endorses this report. "I have several families in my practice who are washing their cats in order to control allergies," says Dr. Johnson. "It's certainly a simple solution that can make a difference. In fact, they were so allergic to the animals, washing was a last resort. If this hadn't worked, they would have had to find another home for their beloved pet. For a cat lover this can be traumatic."

Science News reports that 30 percent of asthmatics are allergic to cats.

As these animals are notoriously fastidious, they clean their fur several times each day. Each cleansing lick of their rough tongues brushes a fine coating of feline proteins across the fur. These proteins, where are produced in the animal's salivary and sebaceous glands, can accumulate for years in carpeting and upholstery. This can trigger a reaction of runny eyes, stuffy nose and wheezing. It affects millions of people. If this happens, cat owners are usually advised to find their pets a new home-or stock up on antihistamines.

Cindy Coulston, age 29, is one such person. "I've had to deal with allergies and asthma all my life," she says. "But my doctor who deals with respiratory problems suggested I keep my cat, Fluffy, as 'dust free' as possible. I've found that a once a month bath eliminates a lot of dust collecting on her fur." Although allergy tests didn't reveal a reaction to cats for Cindy, household dust showed positive.

Washing or soaking a young kitten is easy. But how do you begin this maintenance with an older cat?

Dr. Johnson recommends you start with a large pan or sink filled with 1-2 inches of lukewarm water. Just like when you bathe a baby, you need everything in one place before you begin. Avoid interruptions, such as a telephone or doorbell, if possible. Place a heavy towel

We have also heard that if you wipe the cat with a fabric softener sheet this will help to prevent the dander from escaping into the air.

or piece of screen wire in the bottom of the pan. A cat will feel more secure with a surface its claws can grip.

“After you have everything in reach,” says Dr. Johnson, “you place the cat in the tub. Push the cat straight down from the center back. This is easier than trying to control each leg. Talk to the cat in a calm voice as you move a sprinkler over its body. You may apply a shampoo especially make for cats. However, plain water removes dust. Rinse well, then towel dry. Use a hair dryer on a low speed. In cold weather, keep the pet contained in a small room, such as the bathroom. Turn up the heat so the fur will dry quickly.”

Allergist Dr. Wedner agrees that soap or shampoo isn't necessary. Clean water achieves results. If you do decide to use a shampoo, check with your veterinarian. Cats have very sensitive skin and are allergic to many chemicals.

Pat Carter, another cat owner who believes in this method to control allergies says, “It is best to begin washing your cat when it is still a kitten. Older cats often resist water and there are some that never relax in a weekly bath. In fact, I have a 4-year-old cat that has had a weekly bath all her life. She still hides when she sees me get her towel and water ready.”

Of course, it depends on the severity of your allergies, but a monthly soak for your cat may be an effective and inexpensive way to keep your pet and reduce your need for medication.

## **FOR CAT LOVERS WHO ARE ALLERGY PRONE**

In addition to washing your cat regularly to control allergies, experts suggest these tips.

- Reduce dust from your bag of cat litter. Store your sack of litter outside your house. Dip, instead of pouring, as you change your cat's litterbox.
- Clipping a longhaired cat may reduce the amount of dust which collects on its fur.
- Wear a gauze or paper mask as you groom your cat daily or have someone in the family who isn't allergic to perform this chore. Do this outside if possible.
- Always wash hands after handling your cat. Refrain from touching your face or eyes until after you have washed.
- Circulate air in your home by raising windows a few minutes each day.
- Vacuum instead of sweeping floors. Avoid heavy, dusty drapes and other furniture which can't be cleaned easily.
- Provide your cat with its own bed and blanket. Do not allow it to sleep on your bed or in your bedroom.
- Check with your allergist for medication or possible desensitizing.

## **TIPS**