

My partner is moving in, but they're allergic to my pets ^[1]

1) Alice,

I am very much in love with my girlfriend. She would like to come live with me next summer (between semesters), but I have a cat and she is allergic. I was thinking that if I kept the house well vacuumed, and bought an air filter, gave the cat baths, or something, it might help. Do you have any suggestions? I love them both, neither more than the other, but I don't know what to do. Thanks.

— Friend of Cat

2) Hi Alice,

After all these years, I've finally met The One. He's wonderful, he's kind, he's perfect, he's... he's allergic to my dogs. My mother (who apparently approves of him!) says that there are pills that one can take for allergies to pets. I've searched and can't find anything other than OTC antihistamines and snake oil. His symptoms are mild mucous membrane irritation; however, I wouldn't ask him to live with that or with the side effects that go with antihistamines. Are there other alternatives we don't know about?

Answer

Dear Friend of Cat and Reader,

You both clearly have the best of intentions when it comes to supporting your pets and your partners. When your partners have pet allergies, sharing a living space while keeping them healthy and being a responsible pet owner may seem daunting. And you want all involved to be happy together ^[2]. Though it may seem like a tall order, there are steps you and your significant other can take to make living in a shared space all about the lovin' (and less about sneezing!).

Allergies to household pets are quite common. And while most people think that the hair or fur on a pet is the only problem, the substance (called the allergen) that triggers symptoms of allergies can also be found in their saliva, urine, and in the tiny, microscopic skin flakes (dander) the pet constantly sheds. Though some breeds of cats and dogs may be hyped as hypoallergenic, there are no truly allergen-free breeds (bummer, right?). As far as allergy symptoms are concerned,

those allergic to cats and dogs often experience sneezing, runny or stuffy nose, nasal congestion, coughing, wheezing, watery and itchy eyes, and hives. In order to avoid these symptoms, the recommended remedy for a cat or dog allergy is to eliminate contact with the pet and remove it from the home. The good news is that there are other steps you can take to reduce the likelihood of an allergic reaction for your partners without evicting Fido or Fluffy. Some allergy prevention steps you can take include:

- Keeping your bedroom off-limits (and potentially other rooms) to your fuzzy creatures.
- Limiting their contact with the pet, and when they do come in contact, they can wash their hands.
- Vacuuming regularly with a high-efficiency vacuum and use a HEPA (high-efficiency particulate air) cleaner to remove allergens.
- Grabbing some pet shampoo and bathe your fur friends once a week.

List adapted from the [American College of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology](#) [3].

As you both prepare for cohabitation, you might suggest to your respective partners that they start taking allergy medication a few weeks before the move-in date to prevent an allergic reaction upon arrival. Additionally, having them proactively talk to a health care provider about other treatments to keep allergic reactions at bay could be a good idea, too. Antihistamines and topical nasal steroids tend to be very effective, though decongestant nose drops and sprays aren't intended to be used for more than a few days. If these treatments are ineffective, they can also try immunotherapy, or allergy shots, which reduce allergy symptoms over a longer period of time. However, Friend of Cat, if you're only living together for the summer, this might take a longer time to work than you have together. If your girlfriend and your cat are both stable and continuous elements in your life, this might be a great long-term solution (this goes for you and your partner, too, Reader). You could also try calling your veterinarian and see if they have additional suggestions for dealing with pet allergies.

If the prevention steps and treatment options don't do the trick, it might be necessary to consider prioritizing either your significant other or your pets. Friend of Cat, perhaps you could find friends who would be happy to have your cat stay with them for the summer? Or your girlfriend could rent her own place and you could spend time with her there? However both of you decide to tackle this issue, relationships are always full of compromises, and the ability to find creative solutions that work for everyone is one of the many skills individuals in long-term relationships learn well.

Alice!

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