

## POINTS TO PAWNDER SERIES

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### Manage Your Allergies & Keep Your Pet

According to the Humane Society of the United States, approximately 15% of Americans are allergic to dogs or cats. And, too often, people give their pets up because of allergies. This is tragic for two reasons. First, it often results in the pet becoming homeless and at risk for having to be put to sleep if a shelter cannot find the pet a home. Second, more often than not, the allergy could have been managed and the pet and his or her owner could have stayed together. Here are some simple tips to help you manage your allergies and KEEP your pet.

#### Don't Be Too Quick To Blame Your Pet For Your Allergies!



- First, find out if your pet is even the cause of your allergies. Many suspected allergies to pets are really allergies to other things, like laundry detergents, tobacco smoke, etc. Consult an allergist to find out if you're allergic to pet dander, rather than making an assumption.
- Second, understand that allergies are cumulative, and that many allergy sufferers are sensitive to more than one allergen. Thus, you may be able to alleviate your suffering enough to keep your pet by reducing other allergens in your environment, such as tobacco smoke and dust.

#### Keep Your Pet Clean & Healthy

- Give your pet frequent baths. Even cats can become accustomed to being bathed. You can purchase disposable towelettes to use on your pet between baths.
- Brush your pet every few days (outdoors, preferably).
- Ask your veterinarian for a product that you can use on your pet's coat to minimize dander.
- Feed your pet a high quality diet. Healthy animals produce less dander.
- Wash your hands after you handle your pet.

#### Keep Your House Clean

- Vacuum every few days.
- Keep the house well-ventilated by opening the windows as often as possible (make sure you have screens, so that your pets don't escape).
- If feasible, install a high efficiency air cleaner in your home.
- Keep ducts, furnaces and air conditioner filters clean.
- Wash bedding (yours and your pet's) each week in hot water and bleach.

- Wash rugs, drapes and pillows regularly.
- Use allergen-resistant covers on mattresses and pillows.
- Cover your furniture with slip covers that you can remove and wash.
- Avoid dust and dander-catching furnishings, such as cloth curtains, large throw pillows and upholstered furniture.
- Instead of carpeting, consider installing hardwoods, linoleum, tile, and rugs that can be washed.
- Use dust-free unscented clay cat litter and a covered litter box, because dusty and deodorized cat litter can be as allergenic as your cat.

**Establish A “Pet Free” Zone**

- Make one room in your house “off-limits” to your pets. Most people spend one third of their time in bed, so your bedroom is a natural choice for your “pet free” zone.

**Let Your Doctor Help You**

- Your doctor can prescribe medication or administer allergy shots, if necessary. Be sure to find an allergist who understands your commitment to living with your pet.
- Give it time. Immunotherapy (allergy shots) is the practice of exposing the body to allergens in ever-increasing controlled doses over a period of time to help the immune system.

**Don’t Compound The Problem**

- Remember, allergies are cumulative. So avoid other allergens, such as tobacco smoke and car exhaust, that can irritate and inflame your airways.

**Keep A Healthy Sense Of Perspective**

- Even if you ultimately conclude your pet is the cause of your allergies, try to keep perspective of the fact that you’re pet has been your beloved companion for years and is depending on you for love and safety. Hopefully, you’ll decide your beloved four-legged companion is worth you spending the time and effort to undertake the steps above to minimize any discomfort associated you’re your allergies. Remember how much your pet enriches your life!

**Suggested Reading**

- The Humane Society of the United States, “Allergies To Pets,” [http://www.hsus.org/pets/pet\\_care/allergies\\_to\\_pets/](http://www.hsus.org/pets/pet_care/allergies_to_pets/)
- ASPCA, “Are You Allergic To Your Companion Animal? Breath Easy – You Can Still Keep Your Pet!” [http://www.asPCA.org/site/DocServer/Allergic\\_To\\_Companion.pdf?docID=602](http://www.asPCA.org/site/DocServer/Allergic_To_Companion.pdf?docID=602)

**Important Note:** Indiana-PAW’s POINTS TO PAWNDER SERIES is intended to provide quick tips to help citizens address common pet health and behavior questions. It is not intended to replace consultation with one’s veterinarian and/or a trained behavior specialist.