

FAIRFIELD COUNTY ALLERGY, ASTHMA & IMMUNOLOGY ASSOCIATES, P.C.

ADULT AND PEDIATRIC ALLERGY, ASTHMA AND CLINICAL IMMUNOLOGY

DIPLOMATES OF THE AMERICAN BOARD OF ALLERGY & IMMUNOLOGY

148 EAST AVENUE, SUITE 3G NORWALK, CT 06851 (203) 838 - 4034

PROTOCOL FOR CAT WASHING

Studies conducted by Dr. H. James Wedner and his colleagues at Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis, Missouri, U.S.A. have demonstrated that monthly bathing of cats in distilled water dramatically reduces the amount of the allergen Fel d1 which is the major cause of allergic reactions to cats. In this study, cats were bathed under light anesthesia (ketamine) using one liter (about a quart) of water that had been warmed to body temperature. The cats were gently washed for a period of about 10 to 15 minutes and the water was then expressed from the fur and the cats were toweled off and dried using a hair dryer under the low setting.

There was a profound fall in the amount of Fel d1 that could be assayed in one cat after 3 washes, in a second cat after 4 washes and in all of the 10 cats studies after 8 washes. For the group as a whole, the decrease was from 3031 milliunits to 400 milliunits, a highly statistically significant fall. A final wash done 2 months after the 9th wash demonstrated that the maximum duration between washes that was possible was one month.

We believe that the washing procedure is applicable to both adult cats and kittens. It is relatively simple and discussions with both veterinarians and the American Cat Fanciers Association indicates that it is not harmful to the cats.

Several points should be remembered before embarking on a trial of cat bathing. First, all patients who are sensitive to cats should remember that the best way to reduce your allergy problems is to remove the cat from your home. We realize that many patients are unwilling or unable to eliminate the cat from their environment and the cat washing procedure is designed for these patients. However, not respective of the washing, care should be taken to keep contact with your cat(s) to a minimum. In particular the cat(s) should be excluded from the bedroom, which is a major source of exposure to the cat and hence the allergen Fel d1.

Second, the cat washing procedure takes time. As noted above, the decrease in the Fel d1 allergen does not occur for 3 to 8 months. Thus, before embarking on cat bathing as a means to decrease the amount of allergen in your home, you should remember that you are obligating yourself to bathing your cat(s) for a long period of time. This is important as studies suggest that the washing will have to be continued even after the amount of Fel d1 allergen produced by the cat has decreased to low levels.

Finally, it must be remembered that the washing procedure is only part of the steps necessary to decrease the amount of Fel d1 in the home. Since the protein Fel d1 is

very sticky, it has a tendency to adhere to surfaces all over the home. This includes not only horizontal surfaces such as the floor or furniture, but also vertical surfaces such as the walls. Thus, in addition to bathing cats, we strongly recommend that the house be cleaned thoroughly at several month intervals and that this cleaning should include washing the walls. Alternatively, a spray of 3% tannic acid can be used. This will denature the allergen so that it is no longer a cause of allergy symptoms. The 3% tannic acid solution is available from a number of commercial suppliers. Remember, however, that it should always be tested on a small area before being used as the solution can discolor.

For allergy sufferers who do wish to try cat bathing, we recommend the following:

- (1) Both kittens and adult cats can be bathed. It is easier to introduce bathing to a kitten and if the procedure is continued it will become part of its general routine and will be accepted. Adult cats do not like to be wet, but they can be introduced to bathing if it is done gently.
- (2) Warm the distilled water before bathing the cat; the water should be checked to assure that it is not too hot. The heating of the water can easily be done in a microwave oven. Remember that if you do not like to take cold baths, neither does your cat. In addition, it is easier to introduce the cat to bathing if the water is nice and warm than if it is cold.
- (3) Rub the water over the entire cat taking care to be very gentle when washing the face. Wash 10 – 15 minutes.
- (4) When finished, express as much water as possible from the fur of the cat. Next, towel dry the cat with a soft absorbent cloth. Finally, you can dry the cat further with a hair dryer; always keep the dryer on the lowest setting to avoid burning the cat.
- (5) If you are having difficulty with the washing, there are pet groomers in most cities and towns who have expertise in bathing cats. For a small fee, they will be more than willing to bath your cat(s) for you.
- (6) Remember that washing your cat(s) is not a substitute for good medical care of your cat allergies.

HJW/ml
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