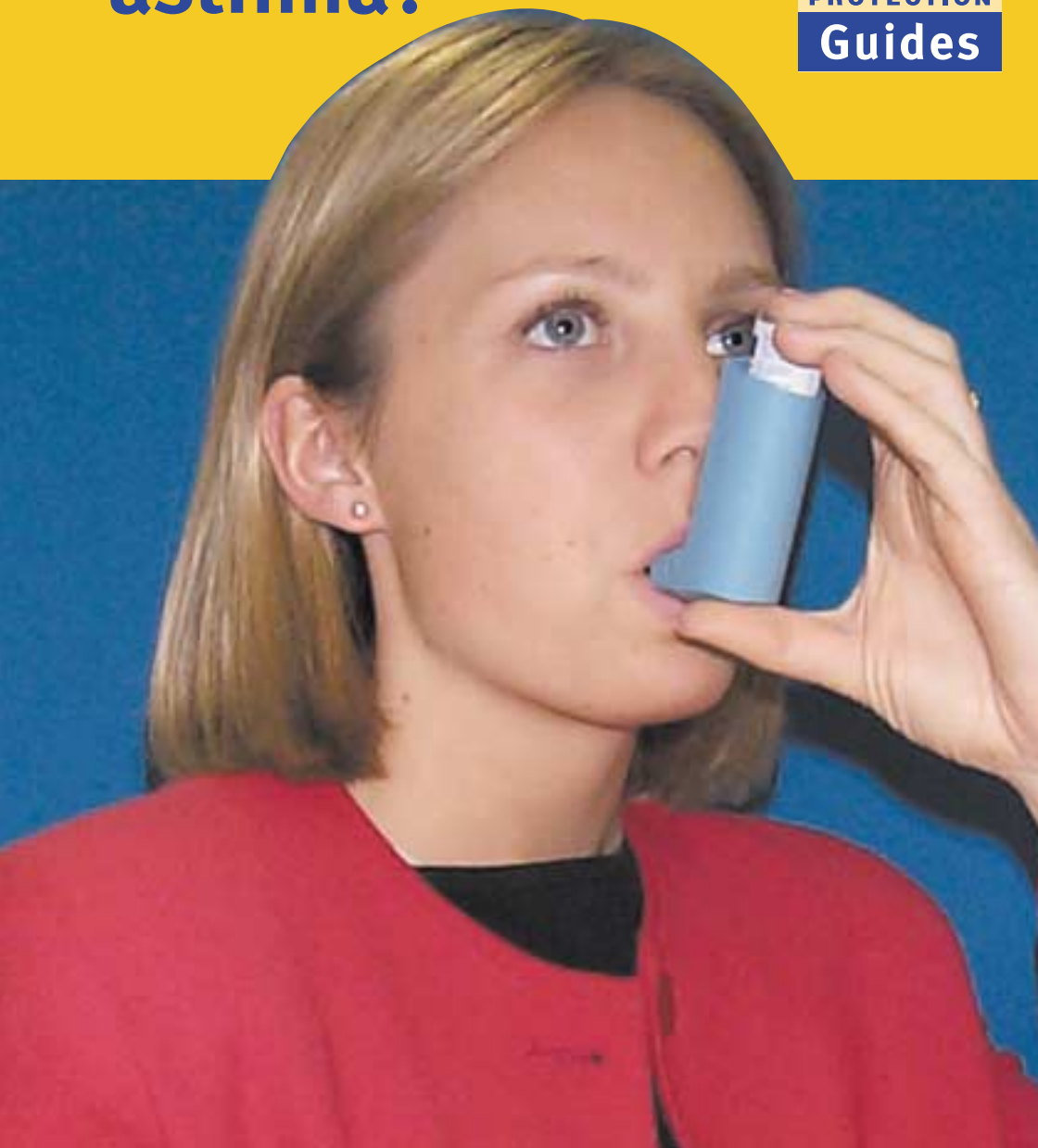
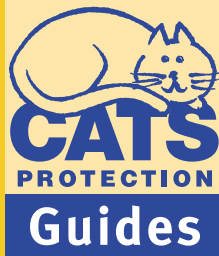


Do you have asthma?



This guide has been written by Mrs V F Gale RGN, DPSN/PN, ATC/RCGP Diploma in Asthma Care. Cats Protection is very grateful to Mrs Gale for researching and compiling this informative guide to help those suffering with asthma to understand their condition better and not get rid of their cats without careful consideration.

There is no doubt that asthma is on the increase. It is a common, chronic condition which attracts a great deal of interest from both the media and, thankfully, the medical profession and all those associated with it.

What is asthma?

Asthma is defined as a disease of the respiratory system involving inflammation of the airways and reversible symptoms of bronchospasm. (1) It is a condition which is subject to much variation, ranging from the patient with occasional mild symptoms to those who can scarcely walk upstairs as they become too breathless.

What causes asthma?

The causative or trigger factors are almost too numerable to mention. They include house dust mite, exercise, stress, upper respiratory tract infections, seasonal elements, animals, emotion, etc.

Why is it increasing?

Various theories have been put forward, but none substantiated, as to why asthma



is on the increase, particularly in the south, such as pollution, toxins from rapeseed, fumes from the nuclear power stations in northern France drifting across the Channel, thinning of the ozone and extremes in weather conditions.

Asthma and pets

We are, by and large, a nation of animal lovers, and it is well documented that the hair or feathers and skin debris from household pets are a common trigger. (2) To generalise, when a diagnosis of asthma is confirmed, some doctors may say it would be advisable to get rid of any animals, but this may depend on their own predisposition towards pets. The pet, if implicated, is highly unlikely to be the only



Keeping your cat out of the bedroom will ensure part of your house remains allergen-free. This is also the part of the house in which you spend most time. Lying down on a bed which has had a cat on it is likely to be an immediate irritant as your eyes and nose are on the same level as the cat dander.

trigger, as the house dust mite is the most common inhaled allergen. (3) They are especially fond of foam-backed carpet and a square metre of this may house up to 1,500,000 house dust mites. (4)

Recognising trigger factors

If the patient's eyes swell and nose begins to run as soon as the cat enters the same room, it is blatantly obvious that it would be in the best interests of all concerned that the cat should be found alternative accommodation. If, however, it is uncertain, a trial separation, combined with thorough house cleaning, could demonstrate whether permanent removal would be of any benefit. It can take two or three months for all the allergens concerned with animals to disappear from the house.

Part of the education programme for asthmatics is to teach them to recognise



their trigger factors and avoid them where possible. It is easy to avoid a room where everyone is smoking and one can take steps to eradicate house dust mites and animal dander at home, but what happens when the asthmatic visits another house? Avoidance of most airborne allergens is not compatible with leading a normal life. Therapy to suppress the body's inappropriate responses is the most likely to be successful. (5)

In a survey carried out in West Sussex, of 100 asthmatics asked, only ten thought they were allergic to animals (four stated cats specifically). **The most common trigger factors were stress, upper respiratory tract infections and exercise.**

Should you keep your pet?

Whilst it is arguable that statistics can be recorded to demonstrate whatever point the author is trying to make, because asthma is a disease of such variation, each case should be considered individually before any decisions are made. Removing a much-loved pet can be very stressful and totally unnecessary if, for example, you only get asthma when you have a cold!



All cats produce the protein which causes asthmatic attacks. However, different cats produce this in different amounts. This means that not all cats will cause problems for asthmatics.

One CP Branch has noticed that one of their fosterer's children will react asthmatically to certain cats and not to others. When a reaction is seen, the offending cat is removed to another foster home. The reaction does not seem to be related to the type or breed of cat.

One has to ask the question, "How severe is the asthma?" If it is very severe then all possible allergens should be removed. If it is mild to moderate and controlled with either occasional or regular medication then try to work out exactly what the trigger factors are for you before taking action.

As a general rule, if a member of the family is diagnosed as having asthma, it would be best not to acquire any new pets.

Further Tips and Hints from Cats Protection

- Make sure that your cat is free from fleas so that he doesn't scratch thus spreading the allergens.
- Grooming your cat outdoors will reduce the amount of allergen indoors. Someone other than the asthma sufferer should do this.
- Occasionally wiping your cat down with a damp cloth should also help to prevent the spread of allergens indoors.
- It is thought that vacuuming may 'stir up' the cat allergens causing the sufferer even more discomfort than before the house was cleaned. Someone other than the sufferer is advised to vacuum, leaving each room to 'settle' before the sufferer enters. A damp mop or cloth run over the carpets after vacuuming will help damp down the disturbed allergens.

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