

HEALTHY LIFESTYLES

# Allergy sufferers beware of male cats

*Cat's sex hormones intensify the release of its allergens*

It's estimated that 15 to 20 per cent of the population are sensitive to animals.

For some it's a problem only when nasal passages are already irritated by grass and pollens; for others, every exposure to fur or feathers brings on the itchy eyes and watery nose.

The obvious solution is to put the pet up for adoption, but asking a friend or family member to give up the companionship of a loved pet may be asking a lot.

**Keeping a pet**

If your allergy symptoms are annoying, but not life-threatening, they may be controlled by meticulous housecleaning, restricting the rooms the pet enters and using antihistamine medications.

For regular use you'll want an antihistamine that doesn't build up in your system, that doesn't react with other medications you may be taking and a product that lets you perform normally.

**Being petless may not solve the problem**

Even people who choose not to own a pet may need to cope with allergy symptoms periodically.

Visiting pet owners can bring in allergens on their clothes. And if you move to a house where there has been a pet, it may take up to six months of meticulous cleaning before all cat allergens are eliminated.

The problem allergen is a protein

that's in the pet's saliva and oil secretions.

As a cat or dog grooms itself the saliva sticks to hair and skin cells which then become sloughed off (dander). Pet hair clings tenaciously to carpets, furniture and window coverings. Dander particles are so small that they become airborne and can be carried throughout the house.

If you are allergic to animals, as soon as you breathe invisible animal protein particles that are floating in the air, your body reacts by producing histamine. A runny nose and itchy, watery eyes start when this histamine attaches itself to special receptor cells in the blood vessels or tissues.

While pets are a common allergen, not all allergy sufferers need to forgo the companionship of a furry friend.

Without proper testing by a physician it is very difficult to distinguish between pet allergy and the symptoms caused by common household dust.

**Minimizing Pet Allergy Problems**

- Accept that there is no non-allergenic breed; even a hairless animal secretes saliva. However, cats tend to be more allergenic than dogs, probably because cats are fastidious groomers. Male cats may be the worst as their sex hormones intensify the release of cat allergen.
- Reduce carpets and upholstered furniture. Cat allergen tends to stick

to clothing and furniture. It's easier to clean bare wood.

- Use microfiltration bags in your vacuum cleaner or consider upgrading to a high-efficiency particle-arresting filter system.
- Someone, not the person with the pet allergies, should bathe the animal weekly.

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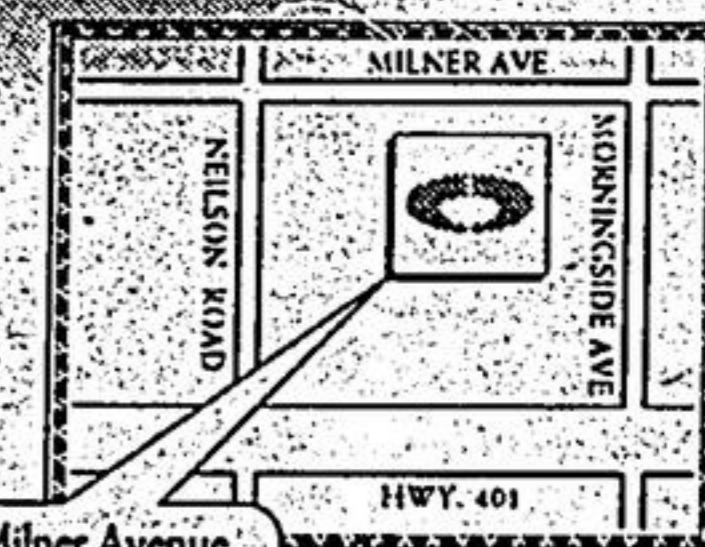
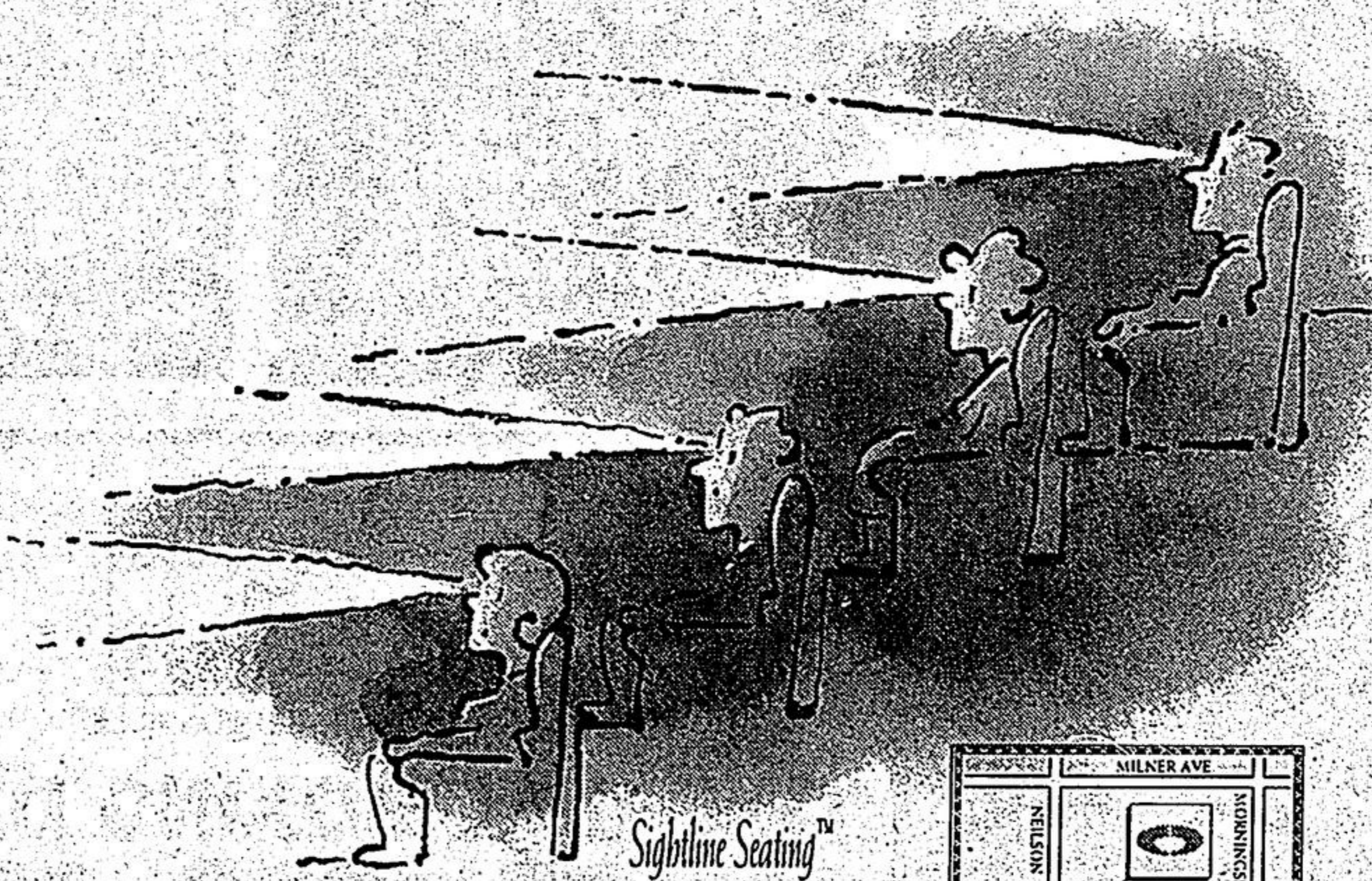
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