

The Truth about Pet Allergies

This article has been reviewed by Clifford Bassett, MD, FAAAAI



Pets provide companionship and fun, but for some people a dog or cat can also trigger sneezing, sniffles and worse. Does an animal allergy mean a life without Fido? Not necessarily.

There is a myth that pet allergies are triggered by animal hair, but they are actually caused by a protein found in pet skin (or dander), saliva and urine. Some dog breeds are labeled “hypoallergenic”, as they shed less, but no dog is 100% hypoallergenic—even hairless dogs still have some allergen. Each animal is different, and a particular pet allergy sufferer may do better with one breed than another.

If you’re allergic and want to get a dog or cat, consider looking for breeds with shorter hair and less shedding, although there isn’t real scientific evidence this will help. Some allergists have suggested that a dog that tends to keep its coat throughout the year may be better for allergy sufferers. Other factors, such as your pet’s disposition, might make frequent bathing more feasible.

- No dog is 100% hypoallergenic. Even hairless dogs produce some allergens.
- Keeping pets out of the bedroom can help reduce allergy symptoms.
- About 10% of allergic individuals have allergies to pets. It can be as high as one out of five individuals with asthma
- Get pet allergy testing and begin allergy treatment (including allergen immunotherapy) before you get a pet can help ease symptoms.

Things you can do to reduce suffering from pet allergies:

- Make your bedroom a pet-free space, and wash bedding in hot water.
- Use a HEPA air purifier/filter to trap dander.
- Clean carpeting frequently, or opt for wood, tile or linoleum flooring.
- Keep your pet outside when possible.
- Speak with your vet about a balanced diet for your pet, which can prevent dry skin and excess shedding.
- Keep your pet off the furniture—cover upholstered chairs with towels and sheets and wash them on a regular basis.
- If your dog rides in the car, use covers on the seats and wash them frequently.

There’s no guarantee that someone who is truly allergic to pets (about 10% of those with allergies) will tolerate living with a dog or cat. If you’re thinking about getting a pet, but are concerned about allergies, consider trying one out on a trial basis. You can also begin allergy treatment before getting a pet, including allergy shots such as for cats.

DID YOU KNOW?

To the Point

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