

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

## The truth about pet allergies



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.

Things you can do to reduce suffering from pet allergies:

- Make your bedroom a pet-free space, and wash bedding in hot water.
- Bathe your pet frequently and have a non-allergic person perform grooming to reduce dander and hair shedding.
- 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.

### DID YOU KNOW?

There is a myth that pet allergies are caused by animal hair. It is actually a protein found in pet skin (or dander), saliva and urine that causes the allergy.

### To the Point

- 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.

An allergist/immunologist is the best-qualified medical expert to diagnose and treat allergies. To find an allergist/immunologist near you, visit the Physician Referral Directory at [www.aaaai.org](http://www.aaaai.org).

For more information on allergies, please visit the Patients & Consumers Center of the AAAAI Web site, [www.aaaai.org](http://www.aaaai.org).



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