

Coping With Pet Allergies



What causes pet allergies?

All pets with fur give off tiny molecules called allergens. All dogs give off allergens in their skin, saliva, and urine. No matter how long or short their hair, or what type of breed, no dog is truly hypoallergenic.

Hair Length Not the Issue

Skin dander attaches to pet hair, and it's the shed hair that's thought to transfer pet allergens to humans. But the *amount* of hair isn't the issue. Dogs with long hair aren't more likely to cause allergy than dogs with short hair. But some dogs, such as the Portuguese water dog adopted by the Obama's, shed their hair less than others do. Also, some people are more sensitive to allergens than others.

Which dogs shed the least dander?

The American Kennel Club lists several breeds that have "non-shedding coats." They shed a bit, but unlike many other dogs, they don't shed an undercoat and tend to give off less dander. The AKA list: Bedlington terrier, bichon frise, Chinese crested, Irish water spaniel, Kerry blue terrier, Maltese, poodle, Portuguese water dog, schnauzer, soft-coated Wheaten terrier, and xoloitzcuintli (Mexican hairless dog).

Designer Dogs

The AKC may look askance, but some specific mixes, called designer dogs, are very popular and are now bred among themselves as separate breeds. One example is the labradoodle. This Labrador/poodle mix is said to be a low-dander dog, although the AKC warns that there's no guarantee these dogs will have poodle-like coats.

Low-dander dogs not low allergy?

Are the AKC's low-dander dogs really the least allergenic? Maybe not. One study of 288 dogs of eight different breeds showed that only Labrador retrievers gave off significantly less allergen than other breeds. Among the most allergenic dogs: Poodles, which are on the AKC low-dander list, and Yorkshire terriers.

Individuals vs. Breeds

Bottom line: When it comes to being allergenic, a dog's individual characteristics matter more than its breed or its sex. Dogs with dandruff give off more allergens. Breeds more likely to suffer hereditary dandruff problems include cocker spaniels, springer spaniels, basset hounds, West Highland white terriers, dachshunds, Labrador and golden retrievers, and German shepherds.

Dust Mites in Dog Domains

If you're sneezing, it may not be the dog. Dust mites -- a major allergen source -- thrive in places where your dog spends the most time. A recent study suggests replacing dog beds that are over a year old, especially if your house lacks central air or if the dog bed is in the basement.

No Hypoallergenic Dogs -- or Cats

Cat saliva carries potent allergens. As with dogs, hair length isn't the issue. Some cat breeds -- Siberian and Russian blue cats -- are reputed to be less allergenic. But there's no such thing as a cat that can't cause allergy.



Dog Allergy Symptoms

The symptoms of dog allergies mirror those of other nasal allergies. They include:

- Coughing and wheezing
- Red, itchy eyes
- Runny, itchy stuffy nose
- Sneezing
- Skin reactions

Skin or blood tests called RAST (radioallergosorbent test) may help narrow down the cause of your allergies. It's good to test because you may be allergic to pollen or mold on the dog and not the dog itself. Even then, the test may not be conclusive.

5 Ways to Cut Pet Allergy

Even when someone in the house is allergic, about 25% of families keep their pet. If Fluffy or Fido makes you sneeze, you might:

- Keep pets out of bedrooms
- Play with pets outdoors
- Wash your hands
- Wash your pet at least weekly
- Get rid of carpets and rugs

How to Get a New Pet

It's a good idea to see how your child reacts to the kind of pet you're thinking of getting. Take your children to visit a home that has that kind of pet and let them play with it, although it's no guarantee that allergies won't develop. If you know your child is allergic but are committed to getting a pet, limit the child's time with the pet at first, and watch for reactions.

Goodbye May Be Best

Allergies and asthma are not a small problem. If your child has a serious pet allergy, often the only solution is to find the pet a new home. Even then, it may take six months or more to completely clear your home of pet allergens.

The Allergy-Safe Pet

If you or someone in your family is among the 10% of people allergic to dogs, consider getting a pet that has no fur or feathers. The American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology suggests a turtle, hermit crab, fish, or snake. Know that these pets also carry health risks. The CDC has warned that exotic pets may carry salmonella or other diseases, and pet turtles have been linked to recent salmonella outbreaks.

Source: WebMD.com

http://www.webmd.com/allergies/slideshow-pets-and-allergies?ecd=wnl_aaa_071210