

The Best Dogs for Allergy Sufferers

If you're tempted to adopt a 'hypoallergenic' dog because you or a loved one suffers from pet allergies, be aware, there is no such thing. Allergic reactions stem from the proteins in a dog's urine, saliva and dander, so choosing these types of dogs may be your better bet.

By Dr. Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Hypoallergenic dogs are said to release fewer dog allergens into their surroundings, with the idea being that they would therefore induce less allergic symptoms in those affected by dog allergies
- In a study that compared the shedding of allergens by hypoallergenic and "regular" dogs, no differences were found
- There's no such thing as a "hypoallergenic" dog, but some people with pet allergies do better with certain breeds than others
- Keeping your dog out of your bedroom, eliminating carpeting and using a whole-house air filtration system can help to minimize pet allergens
- Bathing your pet regularly, feeding a species-appropriate diet and ensuring optimal levels of omega-3 fats and coconut oil may also help reduce dander and shedding

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About 10% to 20% of the global population is allergic to dogs or cats.¹ If you're among them, you may be tempted to adopt a hypoallergenic dog for your household, but this would be a challenging prospect, since there is no such thing.

Hypoallergenic dogs are said to release fewer dog allergens into their surroundings, with the idea being that they would therefore induce less allergic symptoms in those affected by dog allergies. However, in a study that compared the shedding of allergens by hypoallergenic and "regular" dogs, no differences were found.²

They went so far as to note, "Clinicians should advise patients that they cannot rely on breeds deemed to be 'hypoallergenic' to in fact disperse less allergen in their environment." The idea of an "allergy-free" dog is therefore a myth, but there may be steps you can take to live in peace with your dog, even if you have allergies.

Why These 'Hypoallergenic' Dog Breeds Can Still Make Your Eyes Itch

Hypoallergenic dog breeds are often described as those with non-shedding coats,³ such as Afghan hounds, bichon frise, Chinese crested and Portuguese water dogs. However, pet hair itself isn't an allergen — it's proteins in your pet's urine, saliva and dander (dead skin cells) that cause allergic reactions.⁴

Pet hair may collect allergens like dander, as well as carry other allergens, such as pollen, but it's important to understand that even hairless dogs can release allergens into your home. The Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America (AAFA) explains:⁵

"Cat and dog allergens are everywhere. Pet allergens are even in homes and other places that have never housed pets. This is because people can carry pet allergens on their clothing. Also, allergens can get into the air when an animal is petted or groomed."

"Pet allergens can also be stirred into the air where the allergens have settled. This can happen during dusting, vacuuming or other household activities. Once airborne, the particles can stay suspended in the air for long periods."

In people who are allergic to dogs, their immune system reacts to otherwise harmless proteins, leading to an allergic reaction, which can include symptoms ranging from itchy eyes and sneezing to rashes, swelling, wheezing and difficulty breathing. Some people are allergic to all dogs while others are more sensitive to certain dog breeds than others, according to AAFA.

What to Do if You Have a Dog Allergy but Still Want a Dog

Depending on the severity of your allergy, it's possible that you could coexist peacefully with a furry canine family member. Although there's no evidence that dogs with shorter or less-shedding fur are better for people with allergies, the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology (AAAAI) recommends seeking out such a dog on the off chance that it may help.

*"Each animal is different, and a particular pet allergy sufferer may do better with one breed than another," AAAAI states. "... Some allergists have suggested that a dog that tends to keep its coat throughout the year may be better for allergy sufferers."*⁶

Newer treatments, such as immunotherapy, may be effective in lessening allergic symptoms in people with pet allergies,⁷ but there are also other strategies you can take to keep allergens from taking over your home.

"Pet allergens can collect on furniture and other surfaces. The allergens will not lose their strength for a long time. Sometimes the allergens may remain at high levels for several months and cling to walls, furniture, clothing and other surfaces," according to AAFA,⁸ which is why some of the best strategies for reducing pet allergies involve changes made around your home.

How to Reduce Pet Allergens

Pet allergens are everywhere, found in more than 90% of homes, according to the American College of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology (ACAAI). Dr. Dana Wallace, former ACAAI president, suggested doing the following to reduce pet dander in your home and thereby live more comfortably with your pet:⁹

- Keep your dog out of your bedroom
- When washing clothing or bedding, use bleach to reduce allergens

- Cover your mattress and pillows with tightly woven microfiber fabric (“dustmite” covers), which will capture dog allergens
- Use room air purifiers tested for pet dander and vacuum filters
- Use a whole-house filtration system on central heating and air conditioning systems (a MERV 12 filter is recommended)
- Eliminate carpeted surfaces as much as possible, choosing wood, tile or other hard-surface flooring instead
- Choose leather furniture over upholstery
- Bathe your dog regularly

Even with these changes, not everyone with a pet allergy will be able to tolerate living with a dog. Some shelters allow potential adopters to take pets home for a “sleepover” to see if they’re a good match — an ideal scenario if you need to determine if your allergies flare up or not before making a lifetime commitment.

Finally, be sure to feed your pet an anti-inflammatory, species-appropriate diet. I have several family members who are deathly allergic to cats, but because my cats are raw fed their recurrent comments when visiting my house are, “I can’t believe I’m not reacting to your cats.”

By reducing allergenic foods going into your pet you can reduce allergenic saliva (and dander) coming out. Fresh food diets improve the health of every cell of your pet’s body and can often times be the difference between allergic family members living with pets, or not. Adding omega-3 fats to your pet’s raw diet may also reduce shedding and dander associated with essential fatty acid deficiency, and adding coconut oil (both to your pet’s diet and topically) may also help reduce dander and **shedding**.

Sources and References

¹ [Allergy Asthma Immunol Res. 2018 Mar; 10\(2\): 97–105.](#)

² [Am J Rhinol Allergy. 2011 Jul-Aug; 25\(4\): 252–256.](#)

³ [American Kennel Club December 14, 2017](#)

^{4, 5, 8} [Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America, Pet Allergy: Are You Allergic to Dogs or Cats?](#)

⁶ [American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology, The Truth About Pet Allergies](#)

⁷ [Hum Vaccin Immunother. 2018 Apr 3;14\(4\):807-814.](#)

⁹ [American College of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology November 6, 2011](#)
