



Having a pet may actually be good for people's allergies

Do you think pets are bad for kids with allergies?

In some severe cases, this may be true, but for the most part doctors and scientists are discovering that pets are good for allergies.

The Journal of the American Medical Association published a study that showed some surprises. They discovered 15.5 per cent of children in families with no cats or dogs developed cat allergies, which is 50-per-cent more than the homes with two or more cats or dogs. About 8.6 per cent of kids raised in no-pet households developed dog allergies, compared with the tiny 2.6 per cent of kids with two or more cats/dogs who developed dog allergies.

Dennis Ownby, chief of the Medical College of Georgia, Department of Allergy and Immunology, was quoted as stating: "Allergists have been trained for generations that dogs and cats in the house were bad because they increased the risk of you becoming allergic to them. This (study result) is exactly the opposite of what we would have predicted...and it's very significant...Part of the reason we have so many children with allergies and asthma is we lead too clean a life."

This story was printed in the Province in August, 2002, and got much press on television as well, but the story died and people today still believe allergies in the home means no pets in the home, when in fact allergies are drastically improved by cats and dogs in the home.

As Dr. Ownby explained, "What happens when kids play with cats or dogs? The animals lick them. The lick is transferring a lot of bacteria and that may be changing the way the child's immune system responds in a way that helps protect against allergies."

Many kids received allergy shots in the 1960s and '70s. My sister was dragged to and from the doctor regularly for these immune-boosting shots filled with small doses of the things she was allergic to, including cat and dog hair and spittle. Would she have preferred a half-hour on the floor with a spitting, scratching kitten or puppy twice a week? No one asked her, but I'm sure her eight-year-old self would have jumped at the chance to switch needle time for puppy play. Homeopathy, the direct way.

I am not trying to make light of allergies. I understand how

troubling they can be and how truly dangerous they are for kids with breathing difficulties. I want to help. The usual advice of hard surfaces and easy-to-clean rooms is true for



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CAMP GOOD DOG

pet allergy sufferers too. Go one step further by teaching your pet to tolerate being vacuumed by using the vacuum at a distance, then closer and closer, generously giving him the treats he most loves until he loves the vacuum and will tolerate the extension wand passing over him as he eats his treat. Dried fish works well for cats and can be bought in thin wafers designed for soup making.

Dried liver works well for dogs, but you'll know best what your dog will work for. It may even be fetch or a favourite toy that he earns by lying still for the vacuum. Some pets will not accept vacuum grooming no matter what, but you can still keep them clipped short or at least clean with frequent brushing, and baths once a month. No sense

in adding dust, pollen, grass and all the other things your pet crawls through to his fur bouquet.

Try to teach cats to groom themselves outdoors by nailing old pet or hair brushes, or old car snow brushes to boards and placing them outside key cat traffic areas or entrance ways. Most cats will happily rub up against these surfaces, brushing themselves with a little bit of demonstrat-

ing petting and

maybe some catnip sprinkled on top of the bristles. Then you just clean off the brushes or vacuum them regularly. Give each house cat approximately one teaspoon of butter each day. They'll happily lick it off your finger so call them and make them do a trick by name after they get to love their butter treat.

The lactic acid in the butter helps cats break down fur balls and causes them to lick themselves less. Create outdoor spaces for animals like a dog run, or catnip, herb garden so they spend more time resting and rolling outside. Wash pet bedding at least once a week - or more if possible.

Assign pet grooming to the most non-allergic person in the house and insist they do it outside. Give rewards for bags

of fur presented and have it done at least three times a week, daily in spring and fall if hay fever is part of the problem. Sprinkle baking soda on a dry pet, then brush through for added de-scenting effect. Use cornstarch the same way for oily clumps, but keep the pet dry as both baking soda and cornstarch make a dough-like clumpy mess if the pet escapes and gets wet before its brushed out.

If you are ready to get a new pet, pick wisely.

Allergies vary from person to person and are specific to the type of pet. Certain dogs may disturb certain people far more than others and the same is true for cats.

Make sure you are not asking the impossible of a family member with allergies.

Spend time with the pet you want in its adult form ahead of time to ensure the allergic reaction is mild and can be handled with not too much discomfort, and that the animal's presence does not cause an extreme and/or dangerous reaction.

Puppies and kittens do not shed or sweat or spit the same as their adult counterparts. Borrow an adult pet of the type you plan to get and walk it, pet it, put it in your car and make sure the allergic person

has hands-on, indoor, close contact with the pet for hours not minutes.

If you have been a non-pet household due to severe allergies, then start easy with a so-called hypo-allergenic dog. Remember, no animal is truly hypo-allergenic as they all produce dander, saliva, and some hair, though many like Poodles can be almost hypo-allergenic for almost everyone.

Again, check it out before you buy because even the purebred Poodle causes allergies in some people and, in fact, some of those people do better with different dogs. But for the most part the best bet is a purebred Poodle.

Next in line is the schnauzer, bichon frise, wheaton and kerri blue terriers, and the Aire-dale, Bouvier, Chinese crested hairless also work for many people.

Consult a breed book or the Internet to discover more dog breeds which strive for hypo-allergenic breeding. Golden Doodles or Labradoodles

are a nice new choice as they combine the

Retriever loving personality with the Poodle smarts and almost no-shed coat.

They can be clipped short like poodles as can the other dogs listed to keep non-animal triggers like tree pollen under control.

Reports suggest that white cats shed less than black and the more white, the less shedding, though I personally have not found this true in my experience.

I find short-haired cats aggravate cat allergies the least and the more relaxed the cat the better.

Does keeping a cat confined make cat allergies worse or better? Well that depends on whether the person is strictly allergic to cats and nothing else.

In that case, the cat leaving for some hours each day helps the person tremendously and cats take full advantage of the outdoors to do their scratching, rubbing, rolling and grooming.