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6 Common myths about pet allergies

Air Quality News from IQAir, the world leader in air purifiers.

According to The Humane Society, 62% of American households have at least one pet. Yet an estimated 31 million Americans are allergic to animals, including up to 30% of those who have asthma. For these people, congestion, sneezing, runny nose and other allergic symptoms occur whenever they are exposed to common household pets.

It helps to understand how pets can trigger allergies and what steps can help protect you. Below are 6 common misconceptions about pet allergies. By knowing the truth about these myths, you can take action to live comfortably with the pets in your life.



Myth #1: It's only pet hair—especially cat hair—that causes allergies to flare up.

Not true. Pet hair is a nuisance and causes allergies, as it contains saliva or other pet proteins. Allergic reactions to pets are actually caused by pet proteins contained in pet dander such as microscopic skin flakes, saliva, and urine. Overactive immune systems in those with allergies attack these otherwise harmless substances.

Animals with more fur are more likely to carry other allergens such as pet dander and dust, according to the American Lung Association (ALA). If you have a pet, not only do you need to handle pet hair carefully, you also need to clean household dust carefully, as it may contain pet dander that can trigger allergic reactions.

Myth #2: Continuous exposure to animals will eventually desensitize you to them.

Not only is this *not* true, but in some cases the opposite *is* true. If you have a confirmed allergy to animals, whether you are a child or adult, it usually will not get better through increasing exposure. In fact, it may get worse. That's according to the Australasian Society of Clinical Immunology and Allergy.

However, studies have confirmed that early childhood exposure to cats, dogs and other animals may lower the risk of developing allergic reactions later in life. In one study of 8,000 children, researchers found that children continuously exposed to cats from the time they were one year old were 67% less likely than others to develop allergic asthma.

Myth #3: If you just get the right breed of dog/cat/etc., you won't have allergy problems.

Not true. All cat or dog breeds produce dander. However, some breeds are believed to be better for allergy sufferers than other breeds. Typically the best breeds are those that shed the least fur and/or are the most frequently bathed. Also, smaller dogs produce less saliva than do bigger dogs. The American Kennel Club recommends breeds that produce the least dander for allergy sufferers. Those breeds include Poodles, Terriers, Schnauzers, Bichon Frises and others.

Myth #4: Small animals are not a problem for allergies.

Wrong. Hamsters, guinea pigs, birds and other warm-blooded mammals can also trigger asthma and allergies in people with allergies to animal dander, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Birds are also a major problem for many allergy sufferers, as birds release dander into the air through activities such as cleaning their feathers, flapping their wings and flying. If you are allergic to animals but still want a pet, consider animals without dander like a fish, turtle or other reptile.

Myth #5: Outside the home, you shouldn't have pet allergy problems.

Not necessarily. Because of their microscopic size and jagged shape, pet allergens easily stick to clothing and other fabrics and are carried to other locations. Animal dander – in sufficient levels to cause allergies – can be found in many public places such as the workplace, classrooms and hospitals, according to the ALA. Those with severe allergies also may want to avoid the homes of family and friends who have the type of pet that irritates their allergies.

Myth #6: An air purifier will help with pet allergies.

It depends on the air purifier. Only a high-performance air purifier can help. Some allergy sufferers report that small, low quality air cleaners make little or no difference at all. However, many allergy sufferers report that their IQAir air purifier in combination with improved cleaning methods has reduced or completely eliminated their allergic reactions to pets in their homes.

For more information on how to clean pet dander or take other steps to gain control over pet allergens, visit the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency website at <http://www.epa.gov/asthma/pets.html>.

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