

Living With Allergies and Dogs

Take control of dog allergens.

Joanne Mercer

Nicoloudakis has her non-allergic children brush Antares thick coat weekly (he loves the attention). Not all owners, however, have non-allergic family members. If you are allergic [and groom your dog yourself], take a shower after bathing your dog, says allergy immunologist Carl Lehman, M.D., of Honolulu. Put your clothes right into the wash. Don't toss them on the bed or the hamper, where allergens can stick to your bedding or other clothes. If you are asthmatic, wear a mask while bathing your dog.

Additionally, take a look at your dogs diet. According to Gary Buehler, DVM, of Lolo Creek Veterinary in Lolo, Mont., A high-quality diet may produce a healthier coat that sheds less frequently.

Allergy sufferer Tina Durham of Phoenix is extremely happy with Connor and field champion Lucky Lindy of Arizona, her 8-year-old Basenjis. They require little grooming, and I can share my house, my bed, and my life with them, Durham says. This is the first breed of dog I've been able to keep indoors, and I love it! Inside, Durham replaced carpets with linoleum or ceramic tiles, which retain fewer allergens and less dust than carpet. Outdoors, the landscaping is low-allergy, with no grass or pollen to stick to the dogs coats, Durham says, providing another smart environmental strategy for dog owners with allergies.

Regardless of the breed you own, keeping your living environment clean improves your chances for a successful canine relationship. Allergy immunologist Miguel Camara, MD, of Hinsdale, Ill., urges owners to limit their dogs access to one specific area of the house and exclude them from the bedroom and the bed.

In addition, use HEPA (high-efficiency particulate air) filter room air cleaners, Camara says. They remove close to 100 percent of small allergenic particles. Place filters on your furnace and air ducts. Vacuum daily. Use a double-lined vacuum bag. Wipe down your walls. Replace upholstered furniture with non-fabric sofas and chairs. Buehler advises, Open windows every day, to circulate the air.

Your dog needs you as much as you need him, however, and cuddle time is key with one caveat. After you pet him, be sure to wash your hands before touching your eyes or face, Buehler says.

With a thoughtful breed choice, regular grooming, and strategies to control allergens in your home, you may just find that being allergic to dogs doesn't mean an end to canine companionship.

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