

Living With Dog Allergies

By making a few simple changes, you and your dog can live together peacefully.

By Kathy Salzberg, NCMG

Q. We recently got a Shih Tzu and I seem to be allergic to it. My wife has no reaction to him, and we have a Pug that does not seem to affect me. We are willing to have him groomed weekly, and brush him as much as needed. Do you have any advice for pet owners living with allergies?

A. You are not alone. Some 40 million Americans are allergic to dogs and cats. The old answer to your problem was to give up your beloved pet, but today we have products that offer relief to allergic pet owners so you don't have to make that awful choice.

One such product is called Allerpet and it is available in formulas to treat both dogs and cats to cut down on their owners' symptoms. It is an easy-to-use emollient that cleanses the pet's coat of dander, saliva, and other antigens present in urine and coat oils, the very irritants that make bring tears to your eyes and make you sniffle and sneeze. After brushing and bathing the pet, it is sponged onto the coat weekly with a facecloth or mitt and is not rinsed off. Some of my clients have us give weekly baths and allergy treatments to their pets to help them coexist happily. If you are allergic and are applying this treatment at home, I would recommend using a mask.

Some other things that may help are finding an allergy medicine that works for you, keeping the pet in a short puppy cut year-round, installing a good air filtration system and using a vacuum cleaner with a HEPA filter. Vacuum frequently, keeping walls, shelves, and curtains from getting dusty. If you use filters in your home heating system, most of the tiny allergen particles may be passing right through them so they need to be replaced with higher efficiency filters. Your local heating contractor should be able to help you with this.

Special mattress covers and bed linens are also available to shield you from allergens but your furry little friend should not be sleeping in your bedroom or your bed if you are allergic. Wash your bed linens as well as your dog's bedding weekly. Since a dog's saliva is loaded with allergens, replace his chew toys frequently. You may end up with a spoiled dog and a house so clean you can eat off the floors, but you should be able to keep that little Shih Tzu in the family.

Kathy Salzberg, NCMG, is a Certified Master Groomer and writer who has been grooming pets since 1976. With her daughter Missi, she owns The Village Groomer in Walpole, Mass. She has also written extensively on pet care for several consumer magazines and authored three books on dogs and careers with pets. Kathy lives with her pets on Cape Cod.

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