

I've heard that some breeds of dogs are better choices for families with children who are allergic to dogs. Which do you recommend?

As many as 10% of people have allergies to dogs. Conventional wisdom has suggested that poodles, bichons, terrier type dogs, and those who don't do much shedding are the most hypoallergenic breeds. Many allergy sufferers have done well when choosing among these breeds. However, scientific research in this area doesn't support the theory that the amount of dog hair in the house is the problem.

Allergens are the proteins produced by the dog that cause reaction in susceptible humans. These proteins are not part of the dog's hair, but found in the dog's saliva and in their skin cells that routinely flake off as dander into the household environment. All dogs produce dander whether they shed much hair or not. A study published last year in the American Journal of Rhinology and Allergy did not find any difference in the amount of the most common dog allergen between breeds that have been called hypoallergenic and other breeds. The author believes the existence of "hypoallergenic" dog breeds is a myth.

Trying to determine if a certain breed of dog would cause your child's allergies to flare can be difficult. It can take up to 6 months after a new dog is in your home for enough dander to be present to cause allergy symptoms. A faster test would be to go to the home of a breeder of that type of dog, and after spending a few minutes in their environment, see if allergy symptoms are starting.

People who are allergic to their beloved dog can take antihistamines or allergy shots to help reduce their symptoms. Other tactics to reduce allergic reactions include frequently bathing the dog (twice a week) and daily wiping with a damp cloth to limit the release of dander. Use HEPA filters in furnaces, air conditioners, and vacuums. Use extra room air filtration systems in the house. Minimize the amount of carpet in the house, as no amount of vacuuming can remove all of the dander trapped in the carpet fibers. Wood or tile floors are preferable. Dogs shouldn't sleep in the bedroom of people with allergies. Whenever possible, the allergic individual should wash their hands after petting or playing with the family dog. With some extra detail to house cleaning and frequent doggie baths, dogs and allergic people can enjoy each other's company in most situations.

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