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Hypo-allergenic or non-allergenic dogs or cats?

Q. After a recent trip to the local animal shelter, my children want to adopt a dog or cat. I have always considered myself to be a very allergic person and feel that my allergies will become worse if we bring an animal into our home. A coworker of my husband told him there are dogs that are non-allergenic or hypoallergenic, allowing an allergy sufferer to have a pet in their home without having symptoms. I want to know if this is true and which type of dog would be considered non-allergenic. I would also like to know if there are certain breeds of cats that fit into this category?

A. Unfortunately there are no "non-allergenic" cat or dog breeds! All of these have some level of allergen. Further, the allergic potential of dogs or cats is not affected by the length of their fur. This is a common myth! The protein found in the animals' saliva, dander and urine is what causes allergies. Almost 10 million pet owners - including children - are allergic to their animals. The fur of a dog or cat can, however, collect additional allergens such as pollen and mold spores. Cats seem to be more allergenic than dogs. Almost all already-allergic people exposed to cats on a regular basis will become allergic to them as well.

If you plan to introduce a pet into your home, have an evaluation by a board certified allergist incluing skin testing. In doing so, you will know for certain to what you are allergic. If found allergic to dogs or cats, consider immunotherapy (allergy shots). These shots will eventually, over a period of time, desensitize you to these animals, so that you may one day be able to have a family pet without compromising your health or well being.

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