

[IMAGE]

Dog-Gone Allergies!

Your pet may fetch the morning paper for you, or may just be a great lap companion and good friend. Did you know that your pet might also help reduce the likelihood your children will develop allergies?

Pets have been said to raise or lower a child's risk for allergies, depending on whom you talk with. To investigate the relationship between infants' exposure to pets and allergies later in life, close to 500 babies were followed from birth until 6-7 years of age in a recent study in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. The children were tested for both indoor (dog, cat, dust mite) and outdoor (blue grass, ragweed) allergies using a skin prick and a blood test.

Any exposure to two or more cats or dogs before age 1 significantly reduced risk for allergies at age 6-7. For both the skin prick and blood tests, more than twice as many children with no dog or cat exposure as an infant tested positive for an allergy than kids who had been around two or more pets. After considering other factors like parental smoking and bedroom allergen levels, two or more pets reduced the odds for allergies about 75% based on the skin prick and 67% based on the blood test.

By introducing your babies to dogs and cats early on, you may lower their chances for developing annoying allergies down the road. Children with allergies are also more prone to develop asthma - a more serious respiratory condition. So simply preventing allergies may in turn ward off asthma.

Reference:

Ownby DR, Johnson CC, Peterson EL. Exposure to dogs and cats in the first year of life and risk of allergic sensitization at 6 to 7 years of age. *Journal of the American Medical Association* 2002;288(8), pp. 963-972.

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