

Controlling Allergies

No breed is truly hypoallergenic. The proteins that cause allergies (allergens) are present in all dogs. However, dogs that shed very little, or not at all, leave fewer allergens around the house for those who suffer from dog allergies to encounter. Different breeds and different individual dogs may have slightly different chemistry that may either reduce or increase allergens for different individual people. Frequent grooming, a good regimen for healthy skin and coat, and frequent house cleaning and use of air filtration will all reduce the amount of allergens in the house. Training can also help.

1. **Skin and Coat Care:** Allergy sufferers should work hard to maintain a healthy skin and coat in their dogs. This will reduce the amount of dander that is shed as healthy skin does not shed as much dander. An appropriate supplement (fish oil, cod liver oil, coconut oil, etc.) should be given along with a high quality diet and vitamins. Baths should be given as often as possible but no more than every 3-4 weeks using a mild hypoallergenic oatmeal shampoo. More frequent baths can irritate a dog's skin, causing more dander to be produced and therefore more allergens. Dogs should be brushed *at least* on a twice weekly basis to remove dead skin and fur (even "non-shed" breeds lose dead hair just like people do). Skin should be monitored for health (dry, cracking, dander, etc) on a weekly basis.
2. **Cleaning House:** A clean, frequently vacuumed house will have far fewer allergens laying about. This includes dog fur and dander, but also dust, dead human skin cells, mites, etc. To reduce allergens, vacuuming should be done at least 1 time per week, preferably 2 times. A vacuum with a hepa filter built in should be used. Surfaces and furniture should be dusted and wiped regularly (at least once per week) to prevent the accumulation of dog dander. Carpets and upholstery should be shampooed at least once per year, preferably twice. All products used on materials that come in contact with dogs should be hypoallergenic baby products. Harsh chemicals found in most laundry detergents and floor cleaners can irritate a dog's skin causing them to produce more dander and therefore more allergens. Dog bedding should be laundered at least once per week and dog crates and other equipment should be cleaned at least on a monthly basis. All collars, leashes, clothing, etc should be laundered weekly. Toys that are licked or chewed on should be washed regularly, at least once per week. Any drool that occurs because of treat training or feeding should be cleaned up immediately.
3. **Air Filtration:** Having a good whole house or room based air filtration unit will help keep allergens down as well. Many furnaces have a filtration unit built in. Filters specifically designed to keep allergens trapped should be used and changed at least as often as manufacturer recommended. I recommend changing them before manufacturer recommended to further ensure they are not clogged and allowing allergens to escape. If heat/air conditioning is not used through a furnace or central air system, stand alone air purification systems are available. Make sure each unit is bought to the size of the room being purified and that filters are made to trap allergens and replaced frequently. Filter pads can also be put behind vents leading to rooms to provide extra filtration. These should be replaced regularly as well.

4. **Training:** Dog allergens are most often found in the dander, fur, and saliva of dogs. Dogs should not be allowed to lick the person that is allergic. Positive training to reduce licking behavior should be encouraged overall. Dogs should not be encouraged to be up on furniture or in the bed of the person suffering from allergies. If allowed on furniture, dogs should be restricted to laying on their own bedding that can be removed and laundered.
5. **Personal Hygiene:** Allergic people should wash their hands after petting the dog/getting licked by the dog, especially before touching their faces or eyes. Clothing should be worn only once and washed if it came into contact with the dog. Clothing when not worn should be kept off of the floor or up on a surface that the dog doesn't have access to. It is best to keep clothing and bedding in an enclosed area (closet with doors closed, dresser) when not worn to prevent dander from accumulating on it.
6. **Medical:** There is a lot of new research and products out there to deal with allergies. Immunotherapy can work for people and over the counter medications can also help with it. Consult a doctor to find out what the best way to manage your allergies is.

Please be aware that adopting/purchasing a dog is a LIFETIME COMMITMENT to that dog! You are its family, and by bringing a dog into your life with the knowledge that allergies are a concern, you are committing to doing everything you can to make it work. If you cannot be prepared to deal with the symptoms of your allergies or the work that goes into reducing allergens around your house, it may not be a good time for you to bring a dog into your home.