



## Allergies, Kids and Dogs... what you should know...

### First, let's look at why allergies are such an issue lately:

It is now believed by the science community, (and me too), that some allergies can be prevented to some degree, so those of you out there that don't have kids yet, will want to read this section carefully:

Nowadays, we live in a pretty polluted world, which tends to overwhelm our systems, if we're not programmed to accept these allergens. Along with the allergens that most people think of (dust, dust mites, pollen, etc), we also have to consider cigarette smoke, exhaust fumes, etc (air pollution). And, we have lots of chemicals now in our home and work environment that we're not designed to endure (like formaldehyde fumes from the building materials in our homes). On the other hand, at the same time, we are creating excessively clean environments in our homes. Imagine all the products that have become available in the past 10-20 years to help us keep our homes clean and comfortable and more STERILE. Included are antibacterial products that keep germs at bay, innovations like high quality vacuums that keep our carpeting much cleaner than years ago. Almost everyone has a dish washer, that completely sterilizes the eating utensils. The list does truly go on and on. And, our behaviors have changed. Gone are the days where we'd let our kids run around in the yard barefoot. Parents freak out when their babies pick toys or dropped food items off the floor in the kitchen, and stick them into their mouths. Pacifiers are constantly washed when they fall on the floor. We go nuts when the babies try to eat sand. Our kids spend much more time inside this excessively clean home than they did 30 years ago, playing computer, watching TV, etc.

The trouble with our clean behaviors, and keeping our homes so clean, is that this new generation of children doesn't have regular exposure to the natural, harmless, germs and allergens that are supposed to be accepted by our bodies. Studies have shown that children raised in homes with 2 or more dog or cat pets don't have as high an incidence of pet allergies that children have that have been raised (as babies or very young children) without dog or cat pets. Did you know that families that live in homes with more than two toilets tend to have more allergy trouble because these toilets stay cleaner without everyone in the house using one? Our kid's bodies do actually learn to accept the germs from the rest of the family. Our kid's bodies are supposed to LEARN how to handle these foreign things. By depriving their little bodies of these allergens, we are actually creating allergies. So, in order for them to do this, we do need to expose our babies and children to these items. If we want our kids to grow up without allergies, we need to stop being so overly protective about cleanliness and allergens. We need to gently expose our kids to normal, everyday germs and environmental allergens. This should be gentle exposure. Kids constantly exposed to cigarette smoke do have more allergy problems, because their respiratory systems are compromised.

### Now, let's look at the different coat types of dogs:

#### Choosing the right type of coat goes a long way to managing the allergies.

There are four different types of dog coats. There is some overlap or muddying between the four different types. I'll break them down here to make things more understandable.

**The first type** of coat is a short, shedding coat. Boxers, boston terriers, vislas, etc, have this type of coat. People often think that the super short coated dogs won't create much hair around the house, but they are actually horrible shedders. They also have a certain oiliness that also makes them unsuitable for allergic families.

**The second type** of coat is a heavier, longer, undercoated, shedding coat. Collies, golden retrievers, labs, cocker spaniels, and springer spaniels have this type of coat (as well as other breeds). These are completely unsuitable for allergic families, as these dogs are heavy shedders, and oily coated too (designed to repel water).

**The third type** of coat is a harsh terrier coat. Schnauzers, Wire Fox Terriers, etc, have this kind of coat. This coat actually consists of two types of hair - the very hard outer coat, and the soft under coat. This type of coat sheds only when the dog is ungroomed for several months. As puppies, the dogs with this type of coat have this double coat. In the show ring, the hard outer coat is essential, and in order to keep the outer coat hard, it must be plucked out when dead (the hair grows to a certain length, and then goes dormant. At that time, the outer coat is fairly easy to strip out). Now, if you clipper this type of coat, the undercoat becomes the predominant coat. This coat is soft, very pleasant to touch, and non-shedding, as long as the dog is clipped regularly (every 6 to 12 weeks). If unclipped, the coat will EVENTUALLY revert back to the hard terrier coat. This type of coat is actually very suitable for people with allergies, as long as it's properly maintained.

**The fourth type** of coat is the soft, silky or curly, non-shedding coats. These coats continue to grow longer and longer, with a very extended growing life. All dogs (just like humans) actually shed to some degree, but this type of coat has such an extended growing life, without seasonal growth variances, that they are considered non-shedding. Examples of the silky non-shedding coats would be the shih tzu, maltese, and yorkshire terrier coats. Examples of the curly non-shedding coats would be the poodle and the bichon frise coats. Incidentally, if you do not spay your female dog, she will shed about 6 weeks after coming in season. Reason enough to spay!

#### **And lastly, let's look at how we can help manage the allergies:**

It will certainly make a difference in your success in dealing with your child's (or spouse's or your own) dog allergies if you choose the proper type of dog. But it doesn't stop there. You can do so much more. People with allergies (and dogs with allergies) are usually not allergic to just one thing. Typically, the person allergic to dogs is also allergic to cats, pollens, dust, dust mites, molds, etc. That person's body has decided that all these things are foreign. Counter to what you've read above in preventing the allergies, once someone has developed these allergies, we need to try to keep the home as a sanctuary where he/she can get away from ALL allergens, giving his immune system a daily break.

Incidentally, dogs can have allergies too, and the situation works exactly the same as with people, except that dogs generally have more skin problems when allergic, and people have both respiratory and skin problems when allergies are a problem.

Every allergic person can tolerate a certain load of total allergens. If that person is barely below his tolerance of allergens, any additional allergen will likely push him over the edge, bringing out a reaction, or even worse, an asthma attack. So, if you reduce the allergen load in the home, you'll be much more successful when you bring a puppy home. And, you'll be much more successful in preventing an asthma attack even if you don't bring a puppy home!

Again, it's not just the dog itself that can create an allergy problem. The dog will carry mold spores, pollen, dust, dust mites, fungi, and other allergens around in its coat. So keeping the dog clean helps enormously. The dog should be routinely bathed (not more than once a week) to remove allergens from the coat.

Use a hypoallergenic, high quality DOG shampoo (yes, price does matter). People shampoos are too drying. The shampoo should be tearless, and contain a conditioner too. Dilute the shampoo 10-15 parts water, to 1 part shampoo. Good quality shampoos are designed to be used diluted. Only mix up what you'll use in a 2-3 week time span as it can become rancid. Be sure to rinse the dog well, and rinse again. Any shampoo residue will dry out the skin, increasing dander. All dogs have dander, it's unavoidable. Dander is simply dead, shedding skin. Non-shedding dogs don't TRAP the dander, like the heavy undercoated dogs do.

Plan on fairly frequent grooming (hair cuts). Most of our mixes should be groomed every 6 weeks to 12 weeks, depending on the rate of coat growth. A shorter coat will trap fewer allergens (dust, mold spores, pollen, etc) and will be easier for you to keep clean.

#### ***Dogs For People With Allergies Or Asthma***

Whenever I run into someone who suffers from allergies or asthma but loves dogs, they often feel their options are limited to Poodles – this isn't so! There are a lot of wonderful breeds out there that can be great companions to individuals suffering from allergies. Put away those tissues! I've compiled a list of some of the top breeds that are known to be less triggering for people with allergies or asthma:

**Poodles** - The Poodle is the breed that comes up the most when you think of a hypoallergenic or non-shedding dog. Poodles come in 3 different sizes – Toy, Miniature and Standard. While many people believe Poodles originated in France, there is much debate on that subject. Experts believe Germany and Russia also contributed to making the Poodle into what it is today. The Poodle is a multifaceted breed. They are excellent retrievers and hunting dogs and they excel at almost every dog sport in the book. Standard Poodles are good family dogs while Toys and Minis could be hurt by the hands of a small child. All 3 sizes of this breed are very intelligent and can learn many commands. A Poodle has hair and not fur – the breed is non-shedding and will require grooming every 6-8 weeks.

**Shih Tzu** - The Shih Tzu originated in China and is also called the “Chinese Lion Dog” or the “Chrysanthemum Dog”. This toy breed is compact and friendly and enjoys the company of its human companions immensely. The Shih Tzu has a short muzzle and is extremely sensitive to heat. This breed must be kept cool on warm days. The coat of a Shih Tzu can be kept clipped into a “puppy cut” or grown long to show length. If the coat is kept long it needs daily maintenance and brushing. If properly kept, the breed sheds an extremely small amount. A Shih Tzu’s face may have to be wiped after eating or drinking to prevent the fur from becoming soiled.

**Yorkshire Terrier** - Yorkshire Terriers are a toy breed developed in England as a ratting dog. These little dogs rarely weigh more than 7 lbs. Yorkies have no undercoat and are low shedding. Their hair grows until it is cut. Often owners choose very short clips in order to keep grooming to a minimum with this breed. Yorkshire Terriers are intelligent and can learn many commands. They have a tendency to bark at strangers or may ignore them altogether! However, Yorkies have been known to take on dogs much larger than themselves! They often have no idea how small they are!

**Maltese** - The Maltese is a pure white Bichon type dog that originated on the Island of Malta. This toy breed ranges in size from 3-7 lbs. The Maltese is an active and playful little dog who is a great choice for urban dwellers. They are very active in the house and love to engage in indoor games. Short walks are needed to keep them healthy and stimulated. Maltese have no undercoat, thus shedding is almost nonexistent in this breed. Grooming is required to keep their white coats clean and free of mats. This breed is also prone to tear staining which needs to be cleaned daily keep the eyes free and clean.

**Kerry Blue Terrier** - The Kerry Blue Terrier is a multifaceted, medium sized (30-40 lbs) dog from Ireland. The breed has been used for herding, guarding and hunting a variety of vermin from farmlands. Kerry Blues are born black and fade to their blue (which is actually a grey color) until they are about 2 years of age. They have wavy coats that lack an undercoat. They do not shed but do need regular clipping or their hair will grow too long. Kerry Blues have a reputation of dog aggression that has been worked on by breeders throughout the years. This stems from their prey drive as hunting dogs. With their owners (children included) this breed has been known to be a loving companion. They are swift and smart and excel in all dog sports. Early socialization is needed with a Kerry Blue puppy in order to get them used to other dogs. They are not a breed for first time owners.

**Chinese Crested** - The Chinese Crested comes in 2 different types – Hairless and Powderpuff. The Hairless is exactly what it sounds like – naked with the exception of flowing hair on its paws, tail and head (the crest). The Powderpuff variety of this breed has a full coat of soft hair. Obviously the grooming needs of these two types vary greatly. Moisturizer and sunscreen is needed to keep the Hairless variety well kept, while the Powderpuff needs regular brushing. This breed is active and playful, but they can have a tendency towards separation anxiety. They adore their owners and have trouble learning how to be away from them. Consistency is a must when training these little dogs. They love children but make sure kids know how to be gentle when dealing with these little guys!

**Bichon Frisé** - The Bichon Frisé is a popular French (Bichon Frisé means “Curly Lap Dog” in French) toy breed that ranges in size from 7-12 lbs. Bichons are all white and are another virtually non-shedding breed. However they do need some intense grooming to keep their coats clean and well maintained. This breed can be prone to skin issues, so it is very important to keep them clean and free of tangles and mats. A well bred Bichon is a pleasure to live with! They are playful little dogs who enjoy meeting new people and other canines. They do well with children and are generally good companions with cats as well.

**Miniature Schnauzer** - The Miniature Schnauzer originated in Germany and is believed to be a cross between a Standard Schnauzer and a Poodle as well as a breed such as an Affenpinscher. These compact little dogs (11-15 lbs) are generally low shedding and are recommended for folks with allergies. Mini Schnauzers are great guard dogs and will generally vocalize if a stranger enters the home until they are assured it is a welcome guest. They have a very high prey drive and are not a good choice for homes with smaller animals. The breed usually has an alert look and is always up for playtime or a romp at the park.

**Airedale Terrier** - The Airedale is nicknamed the "King of Terriers", as it is the second largest of the terriers (the largest is the Black Russian Terrier). Airedales come in 2 different sizes, one ranging from 35-70 lbs and the larger type (called Oorang Airedales) ranging from 60-100 lbs. The Airedale has a wiry coat and is a low shedder. Grooming is done by stripping (loose hair is removed from the undercoat with a specially designed blade). The breed is extremely intelligent and is known to be stubborn and fairly difficult to train. They often grow bored of training sessions and need a creative mind to keep them interested. They are athletic and require a great deal of exercise and physical stimulation. Airedales have been known to excel in obedience, agility and protection work.

**Havanese** - The Havanese is also known as "Little Dog from Havana". The Bichon type breed was developed in Cuba. Once the Cuban Revolution occurred the furry toy breed became few and far between. When they began to gain popularity in the US during the 1970's there were only 11 dogs stateside to work with! While the Havanese may be toy in size, these little dogs are big in personality! Even their AKC standard doesn't want them "dolled up" - "his character is essentially playful rather than decorative". The Havanese doesn't shed much at all, but the coat does gather dander that should be brushed out on a regular basis to keep from irritating allergy sufferers. The breed comes in a multitude of colors and patterns. As for temperament, Havanese are smart and affectionate and have a history as Circus dogs! They are quick to catch on to training and adore the company of their human companions.

**Puli** - The Puli is a corded (think dreadlocks) Hungarian breed that ranges from 20-30 lbs. The unique look of the Pulik (plural of Puli) serves a purpose – the cords are water resistant. They do need a great deal of maintenance to keep them looking in their best shape. Pulik are extremely active dogs that have a natural affinity for herding. Because they are used to protecting a flock, they will defend anything they see as theirs with a vengeance. They need careful training or they will believe they control the household.

**Coton de Tulear** - The Coton de Tulear is a Bichon type toy breed that originated in Tulear, Madagascar. The Coton has a fluffy medium length coat that is made up of hair, rather than fur. They do very little shedding, but do need daily grooming to keep their coats free of snags and other dirt. Cotons are known to be incredibly affectionate with humans and very good with other dogs as well. This breed sometimes vocalizes during play. They are very trainable and desire to please their owners.

**Bedlington Terrier** - The Bedlington Terrier looks more like a lamb than a dog at first glance due to it's extra wooly coat! This terrier comes from the town of Bedlington, Northumberland in the United Kingdom. This breed ranges in size from 18-23 lbs and comes in a variety of colors (though Bedlingtons should never be all white). You wouldn't know by looking at these unique dogs, but the breed was used for dog fighting, hunting and retrieving. They are incredibly smart and very loyal to their owners. They can be headstrong and aggressive with other dogs so they need to be carefully socialized at a young age. Bedlingtons don't shed but they do need weekly maintenance to keep their thick coats well maintained. They also will need professional grooming every 2 months.

**Dandie Dinmont Terrier** - The Dandie Dinmont Terrier (say that 10 times fast!) is a short-legged breed that originated in Scotland. The DDT ranges from 18-24 lbs and is a big dog in a little body. They make great watch dogs and will alert you to any changes they think you should know of. They are very affectionate and loyal to their owners. However Dandies, especially males, like to be the Alpha dogs within the home and may not get along with other dogs. The Dandie Dimnont Terrier does not shed. Dead hair needs to be brushed or combed out daily.

**Polish Lowland Sheepdog** - Polish Lowland Sheepdogs are often called PONs, this stands for Polski Owczarek Nizinny – the breeds Polish name. PONs are a medium sized breed that requires a moderate amount of exercise. They make great watchdogs and are sometimes wary of strangers. With their family, the breed is playful and loves to participate in all kinds of activities – from hiking to fetch! Polish Lowland Sheepdogs are non-shedders and loose a little dead hair each day just like we do. This can be picked up with daily brushing that will help keep their coats free of mats.

**Portuguese Water Dog** - The Portuguese Water Dog is a fairly rare breed that was used in Portugal to herd fish into nets, retrieve tackle and broken nets, and to act as couriers between ships. This breed has webbed toes to help it navigate through the water with ease! The PWD is often compared to a poodle, as they both are non-shedding with curly coats and are extremely smart and easy to train. However the PWD is a much stockier breed. Portuguese Water Dogs need regular grooming to keep their coats from matting and their must be trimmed as it grows indefinitely. The PWD is a working dog that catches on to training very easily and swiftly. This breed has a tendency to bond closely with one member of the family. This is an active breed that needs to be kept busy and moving or they can become destructive.