

Can growing up with pets help prevent allergies?

AUG 25, 2026



Featured topic and speaker

Can growing up with a pet help reduce the risk of allergies? Research suggests that early exposure to animals may play an important role in how a child's immune system develops. Veterinarian Courtney A. Campbell, DVM, DACVS-SA discusses studies that indicate children who are exposed to pets early in life may be less likely to develop certain allergies, eczema and hay fever.

Suffering from allergies? Find out more about [seasonal allergies](#).

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Speaker

- **Courtney Campbell, DVM, DACVS-SA**, veterinary surgeon

Transcript

Dr. Campbell: The best thing that you can do for your child's immune system may be simply growing up with the pet that you already love.

Basically, in the first two years, your immune system, it's learning. It's starting to calibrate. It starts to learn what's good and what's bad. And if an environment is too sterile that is not exposed to a variety of allergens that can come through animals, dirt, just normal living, it can start to become hyperactive. And it will respond to normal things as a threat. Therefore, growing up around animals allows the immune system to calibrate itself.

In a study looking at teenagers, those who had early exposure to cats had a 48% decreased chance of developing cat allergies. Prenatal exposure also had a reduction in eczema, hay fever and other types of allergic disease.

Essentially, you get an immune system fine-tuned to what's actually a threat and what's not. This doesn't mean that every family should run out and get a pet. This is a conversation between pediatricians, veterinarians and the families that love pets.

Pet Owner: Watching my son and his dog's relationship is one that I wish I had when I was younger. And there's just that companionship from the time he wakes up in the morning until the time he closes his eyes.

Disclaimer: This video is for educational purposes only and is not medical advice. If you have questions about your health, please consult your doctor.