Is it Okay to Have a Pet When You Are Asthmatic?

by BRENDA VANTA

Pet Dander and Asthma

Asthma and allergy often occur together, because the same triggers (i.e., pollen, dust mites, pet dander and food allergies, to name a few) can cause both hay fever symptoms as well as asthma symptoms such as breathing problems, wheezing and tightness in the chest. This form of asthma is medically known as allergy-induced asthma. While pollen and allergens are seasonal, having a pet all year around in your home will constantly cause symptoms if you are allergic to pet dander.

Beyond Your Cat's Dander

Your cat's dander is not the real culprit, but the carrier of those substances that trigger symptoms. Certain components from the animal's saliva or other secretions, as well as the urines and feces, are the real triggers of your asthma episodes. Besides domestic pets such as cats, dogs and birds, other animals like rabbits, hamsters, mice, rats and horses can trigger an asthma attack.

Treatment

While allergies and asthma are typically treated with different drugs, some medications can help in both cases. For example, leukotriene modifier (Montelukast), Allergy shots (immunotherapy) and Anti-immunoglobulin E (IgE) therapy can help relieve symptoms of both asthma and allergies. Your doctor will find the best treatment for your condition, which usually involves a combination of a few drugs. Keep in mind the best way to avoid symptoms is to prevent exposure to allergens. That's why the best way to avoid symptom aggravation is to find another owner or a shelter for your pet.

Consider Alternatives

If you love pets, why not choose one that would be unlikely to trigger asthma symptoms? How about a turtle or getting a tank filled with exotic fish? They don't require as much of your time and attention as a dog or a cat, but they can still be great company. It is also much easier to clean up after them, too.

If You Keep Your Pet

Be aware your symptoms will aggravate from time to time. The best thing you can do is to limit your exposure to your pet. Let your pet sleep over at your family or friends once in a while. Keep your pet outdoors as much as you can. Consider getting your pet washed and groomed by someone else once a week. Don't cuddle too much with your pet (remember, the saliva gets on its fur when the pet cleans itself) and can easily worsen your symptoms. Clean the house (including the carpet and sofas) regularly. Don't allow your pet in the bedroom or other rooms where you spend lots of time. Consider investing in a vacuum and air cleaner that uses HEPA (high-efficiency particulate air).

The good thing about asthma is that it typically improves as you age. It is known that its incidence decreases with age. As your symptoms improve, you may want to experiment and see if you can have again pets in your home without getting problems. Just keep in mind that allergic reactions may persist, and new ones can develop over the years.