

# Parents (and Parents-to-be): Keep the pet, but watch out for food allergies

By ACSH Staff — June 21, 2011

Today's *Science Times* [debunks](#) [1] the commonly held belief that pets raise a child's risk of developing allergies. Columnist Anahad O'Connor cites a recent *Clinical & Experimental Allergy study* [2] in which researchers monitored the exposure of 566 children to indoor pets from birth until age 18 and collected blood samples to test their allergic sensitization at the end of the study period. The researchers found that children who lived with a cat in their first year of life were about half as likely to be allergic to the cats as those who had not. For boys, living with a dog during infancy also decreased their risk of developing a dog allergy, although the effect was weaker in girls. The authors concluded that having a pet in later years did not affect whether a child would develop allergies, and that pet exposure during the first year of life was the most critical time for developing immunity to pet allergens. The take-home message to parents, says ACSH's Dr. Gilbert Ross, is that the research comes out in favor of keeping your beloved pet. Some parents-to-be have even shed their pets in anticipation of bringing home a new baby; this study should encourage them to keep their furry friends.

For [food allergies](#) [3], though, the news is not as positive. The latest study on food allergies estimates that about about 1 in 12 kids aged 18 and under suffer from at least one food allergy. Publishing in the journal *Pediatrics*, researchers from Children's Memorial Hospital in Chicago conducted an online survey of almost 40,000 parents; the allergy cases were reported by parents and evaluated by an expert panel. Of the children with allergies confirmed by the panel, 40 percent had experienced severe reactions and 30 percent exhibited multiple food allergies. The most common food allergies were to peanuts, shellfish, and milk.

Although skeptical about the method of parental reporting, Dr. Ross says that the findings are generally consistent with previous data on food allergies. Lead author and pediatrician Dr. Ruchi S. Gupta emphasizes that it's very important that people understand that this is very real. Some parents, they don't even tell me about a food allergy because they don't think a doctor can do anything. They may just stay away from certain foods.

Dr. Ross advises parents to heed Dr. Gupta's advice and consult a health care professional if they suspect their child suffers from food allergies.

---

COPYRIGHT © 1978-2016 BY THE AMERICAN COUNCIL ON SCIENCE AND HEALTH

---

for-food-allergies

**Links**

[1] <http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/06/20/really-pets-can-raise-a-childs-risk-of-developing-allergies/>

[2] <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1365-2222.2011.03747.x/abstract>

[3] [http://today.msnbc.msn.com/id/43447764/ns/today-today\\_health/t/peanuts-milk-shellfish-kids-may-have-food-allergies/](http://today.msnbc.msn.com/id/43447764/ns/today-today_health/t/peanuts-milk-shellfish-kids-may-have-food-allergies/)