

Pets can double as asthma antidote

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(HealthDay)—The "hygiene hypothesis" holds that early exposure to a variety of microorganisms may decrease the risk for chronic inflammatory diseases, like asthma.

Two Swedish studies that tracked 650,000 children found that [exposure](#) to farm animals and even dogs can have this kind of beneficial effect. Living on a farm cut kids' asthma rate by half. Just having a dog in baby's first year was linked to a 13 percent lower risk of asthma later on, the researchers reported.

Most Americans don't live on farms, but these findings show that raising a baby in a household with a dog might have benefits beyond love and companionship. Early exposure to cats as well as [dogs](#) may offer some protection from developing allergies and asthma, health experts suggest.

Other steps can also help prevent childhood asthma.

First, don't smoke or allow anyone else in your household to smoke. Smoking when pregnant increases the chances of your baby wheezing during infancy. And continued exposure to [secondhand smoke](#) has a direct tie to asthma and other respiratory illnesses in kids.

Also, try to breastfeed baby for at least four to six months to strengthen his or her [immune system](#) and help avoid infections that start in the lungs, common asthma triggers.

Other suggestions:

- Reduce exposure to dust mites, a common allergen.
- Use zippered covers on pillows and mattresses, wash all bedding in hot water once a week and keep the humidity in your home below 50 percent.
- If you can, keep baby's room free of carpeting and upholstered furniture, places where mites hide.

More information: You can find more tips on [preventing asthma](#) and allergies in your kids from the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma

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