

Obama's Search for a Hypoallergenic Breed Opens the Door to Dog-Ownership for Millions of Allergy Suffers

Hypoallergenic breeds have gained much attention recently as a result of president-elect Obama's search for a dog for his allergy-suffering daughter Malia. As a matter of fact, Obama commented wryly in his first press conference as president-elect that the canine question had "generated more interest on our Web site than just about anything."

Seems Malia isn't alone. Approximately 10 percent of Americans are allergic to dogs*, with reactions ranging from itchy eyes to more serious complications such as asthma attacks or constricted breathing. While no dog is 100 percent hypoallergenic, there are many breeds with consistent and predictable coats the American Kennel Club® (AKC) suggests for allergy sufferers. These breeds have non-shedding coats, which produce less dander (it's the skin dander that is attached to pet hair which causes most pet allergies in humans).

So what breeds are up for discussion as potential first pet for the Obamas? Hypoallergenic canine candidates include:

- Bedlington Terrier
- Bichon Frise
- Chinese Crested
- Irish Water Spaniel
- Kerry Blue Terrier
- Maltese
- Poodles (Toy, Miniature or Standard)
- Portuguese Water Dog
- Schnauzer (Miniature, Standard or Giant)
- Soft Coated Wheaten Terrier
- Xoloitzcuintli

"These breeds may be just what the doctor ordered for people with allergies," says Lisa Peterson, spokesperson for the American Kennel Club. "There are a variety of sizes, energy levels and temperaments, yet all are well-established in their coat type. Dogs that are AKC registered have pedigrees reaching back decades, if not a century, and so the characteristics that make them better companions for allergy sufferers are fixed through decades of breeding for consistent type."

"Designer dogs," often mixed with poodles, are not recommended for allergy sufferers due to their unpredictable coat. There is no way to guarantee a litter will produce puppies with equal Poodle coats, making the high prices unjustifiable and the claims of these dogs being ideal misleading at best. A "designer dog" lacks the predictability and could pose a problem for Obama's allergy-suffering daughter.

Pet owners should prep the home when it comes to keeping allergens at bay. Measures that help include removing carpets, heavy drapes and upholstered furniture that trap dander; washing pet beds often, and grooming your dog frequently, and not letting the pet sleep on the bed of an allergy sufferer.

Before you acquire any dog, research the breed to make sure its needs fit your lifestyle. Additional information on hypoallergenic breeds – including traits, can be found on the AKC website at www.akc.org.

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* According to the American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology