Indoor Pet Ownership’s Effect on Health: For Good or Bad

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Having indoor pets provides health benefits to pet ownerships in several ways, including healthy behavior motivation, social capital aspect, harm reduction, and potential participation in treatment plans. However, exposure to domestic pets links to allergic sensitization to their inhaled allergens. Allergic sensitization is the major driving mechanism causing allergic airway disorders, such as allergic rhinitis, allergic conjunctivitis, and asthma. In Thailand, cats and dogs are the most common pets in home. Allergic sensitization to cats and dogs accounts for 12% of the general population. However, individuals with persistent asthma, the allergic sensitization rate increases to 25-65%. It is clear that pet allergen exposure correlates with poor asthma outcomes in sensitized adults and children with asthma. Adults with greater exposure to dog and cat dander develop a significantly higher rhinitis symptoms. In contrast, dog dander exposure in children is found to be associated with a lower prevalence of allergic sensitization. Hence, the most effective strategy for allergic sensitization prevention is to remove pets from home. Frequent washing of pets and using high efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filters can reduce airborne allergen levels. Nevertheless, no significant improvement in asthma or allergic rhinitis symptoms has been reported. Apart from allergen avoidance and pharmacotherapy in allergic disease, pet allergen immunotherapy is an effective method for reducing allergic symptoms.

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