

Correspondence

Cats and dogs: An attractive remedy versus atopy?

To the Editor:

Because I am very keen on cats and dogs, I read with interest both the article by Mandhane et al.¹ and the related editorial.² The first article provides evidence that living with cats and dogs is associated with a lower risk of atopy during childhood and young adulthood.

As stated in the editorial,² it is not possible to evaluate whether the protective effect is associated with cat allergens, dog allergens, or both or with other exposures, such as endotoxin and other microbial products that have been linked to the presence of animals. A “healthy worker” effect has been invoked as a possible explanation for the lower prevalence of atopy among children raised on farms.³

I think that the presence of both dogs and cats can be related to the presence of a garden in the house of these pets owners, therefore they surely have been indirectly in contact with mud and its bacterial population.

Even if no garden is present, it can be assumed that dogs need to be taken for a walk at least twice a day, whereas cats are mostly present at home, and this may influence the results reported by Mandhane et al.¹ How many times do owners take care to wash deeply and disinfect the legs of their favorite pets?

Furthermore, it has been reported⁴ that cat ownership in Europe is highly variable and not exceptionally high, but pet ownership is not an absolute criterion to be referred to. According to Eurispes,⁵ in 2006 about 6.5 million dogs and 8.5 million cats were thought

to live in Italy, of which half a million and 2.5 million, respectively, were strays. How many times have babies been licked in the face by a puppy or had an arm or hand scratched by a kitten? By the way, I have never owned dogs or cats, but I practically always stop to pet my friends’ pets and most of the stray pets I encounter.

Together, these facts could act as a powerful means to induce atopy, along with the minor daily wounds that my generation normally reported during our rough but happy childhood.⁶

Oreste V. Brenna, PhD

From the Dipartimento di Scienze e Tecnologie Alimentari e Microbiologiche, Università degli Studi di Milano, Italy. E-mail: oreste.brenna@unimi.it.

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