

Should Your Pet Sleep in Your Bed?

By Stephanie Bouchard



When one of Brian Collins's friends asked him to stay at her house and dog-sit while she was away for the weekend, his friend told him her dog wasn't allowed on the bed. "The dog slept on the bed with me for the weekend, and then there was no going back," says Brian, a self-described "extreme owner" who on any given night has 3 dogs and 2 cats sleeping with him.

Strong feelings arise when the question of whether or not to let pets sleep with us in bed comes up. For those in the "no way" camp, there are concerns about parasites and diseases that could be transmitted from pet to person (*zoonotic diseases*), or even person to pet. For those in the "wouldn't have it any

other way" camp, the emotional comfort and bonding with their pets far outweigh any disease transmission worries.

There's really no right or wrong, black or white answer when it comes to deciding to let pets sleep with you or not, says Brian, who happens to be a veterinarian at Cornell University's Richard P. Riney Canine Health Center. "I think it depends on two things: You want to make sure that it's right for the person, [and] you want to make sure it's right for the pet," he says.

How do you assess whether sharing a bed with a pet is right for everyone who will be in that bed? Here are some factors to consider.

Health Status of You and Your Pet

- Do either of you have mobility issues? It may be challenging for you to maneuver around in bed or get out of bed with a pet or pets in it. Is your pet strong enough or able to squirm away from you if you're too close or leaning on them during sleep?
- Do either of you have a skin disorder or open wounds? You don't want your pet to lick your wounds or broken skin while sleeping because that can result in life-threatening health consequences, such as sepsis. If your pet has a skin disease or infection, that can be transmitted to you. Is your immune system suppressed or compromised because of chronic illness or medical treatment, or are you pregnant?

You could be at greater risk if you're exposed to zoonotic diseases, and you should talk to your doctor about sleeping with pets.

- Do you have COVID? You could transmit the virus to your pet.¹

Sleep Quality

In some ways, sleeping with pets is like sleeping with people. They move around. They fart and snore. They hog space and blankets. Getting good sleep is important to health, but sleeping with pets in the bed is not likely to result in getting quality sleep, according to a Mayo Clinic sleep medicine study on the effect of dogs on human sleep.² The 2017 study found people do sleep better if their dogs are in the bedroom with them, but they don't sleep well if they're sharing their bed with their dogs.

Your Pet's Boundaries and Comfort

Is Your Pet Willing and Ready?

Although many pets relish sleeping in bed with their people, not all pets do. "Let the pet choose where they sleep, and respect the pet's boundaries, if possible," says Dr. Marie Hopfensperger, a veterinarian and behavior specialist who runs Michigan State University Veterinary Medical Center's Behavior Service.

If your pet is willing, before letting them sleep with you, says Dr. Jane Davis, a distinguished professor of biology and chair of the human-animal studies program at Aurora University, they should be:

- Getting regular veterinary exams and care
- On year-round parasite control products that protect against ticks, flea infestations, heartworm disease, and intestinal parasites
- Vaccinated through at least their first set of vaccines
- House-trained

- Without or not in active treatment for skin diseases, allergies, or wounds
- Large enough that you can't roll over on them while sleeping
- Mobile enough that they can safely get off and on the bed and move away from you if needed
- Socialized appropriately, especially so they have a sense of independence for times when they can't sleep with you and do not exhibit aggressive behaviors related to the bed, such as biting or snapping if you accidentally bump them when they're sleeping

Is Your Pet Comfortable Sleeping Away From You?

All 3 experts stress the importance of not making sleeping with you essential to your pet. There will be circumstances that arise—pregnancy/bringing a baby home, illness, travel, surgery—during which your pet may

not be able to sleep with you. "Being removed from the bed is going to be really difficult for an animal [who] has never experienced any independence," says Dr. Davis.

Before you're in a situation in which your pet can't share a bed with you, get them used to sleeping on their own. Given time and encouragement, notes Dr. Hopfensperger, pets can be trained to be comfortable sometimes sleeping with you and sometimes not.

And in case you're wondering about the fate of Brian's relationship with his friend who returned home to a dog now set upon sleeping on the bed: They're still friends.

When not walking her cat on leash around their yard in Maine, Stephanie Bouchard writes about pets and healthcare.



References: 1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). What you should know about COVID-19 and pets. Reviewed January 11, 2023. Accessed March 23, 2023. [cdc.gov/healthypets/covid-19/pets.html](https://www.cdc.gov/healthypets/covid-19/pets.html). 2. Patel SI, Miller BW, Kosiorek HE, et al. The effect of dogs on human sleep in the home sleep environment. *Mayo Clin Proc.* 2017;92(9):1368-1372. doi:10.1016/j.mayocp.2017.06.014