

Time to Kick the Cat Out of Bed?

Sharing the bedroom with your pet is a personal choice — just not one I prefer.

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Earlier this week, Britain's top veterinary surgeon caused a stir in the pet world when he advised against sharing a bed with the family dog.

The surgeon, Fred Landeg, argued that the practice jeopardizes human health because new and emerging diseases, such as SARS and MRSA, can be spread from animals to humans.

Landeg was responding to a study conducted in a British town that found nearly 20 percent of dogs slept in the bedroom and 14 percent on a person's bed.

Although the study did not specifically mention cats, Landeg's comment that pets can transmit illnesses as easily as farm animals has forced owners of all types of pets to reevaluate their sleeping habits.

Frankly, I have been making a similar argument in my household for some time now.

While I'm not absolutely opposed to the notion of sharing a bed with a pet, it's not a lifestyle choice I prefer. Plus, my allergies make it nearly impossible for me to sleep under cat hair-encrusted covers. My husband, on the other hand, has been known to give in to our cats' 3 a.m. scratching at the door.

The issue boils down to personal choice. I'm not cool with a cat cleaning its backside next to my pillow and waking up with grains of litter embedded in my skin. But, if that's not the case for you, by all means, hunker down with your furry friend for the night. I know plenty of readers who will argue that the comfort they feel when curling up with their cats far outweighs the risk of contracting an illness.

However, before allowing your pet into your bed, you might want to take a few simple precautions.

First, take your pet to the vet to have it checked for health problems, including parasites like fleas, ticks and roundworms, which easily are transmitted to humans from cats and dogs.

Proper hygiene, including washing bedclothes frequently, is essential. Also, it's best to keep your cats indoors and limit their contact with other animals, to reduce the risk of contracting diseases.

As for the cats-in-the-bed debate at my place, the verdict was handed down last week when our Himalayan coughed up a hairball on my husband's side of the bed. Scraping the contents of Loki's stomach off the sheets was enough to convince him that our cats don't make ideal bedfellows.

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