

Sleeping with your Pet – Should You?

There was an article in USA TODAY by Elizabeth Weise recently that speaks to the love affairs so many of us share with our canine and feline companions to the point where many of us actually sleep alongside our animal companions. Many, many of us admit to loving them and sharing our beds with them, but is this practice safe? They may put us at ease, make us feel warm and cuddly, toasty, comfortable and at peace... But do we need to worry about health issues that may arise from this sleeping arrangement? Can sleeping alongside your pet make you sick?

More than 62% of American households have pets, and somewhere between 14% to 62% permit their cats and dogs to sleep with them. Professor Bruno Chomel of the University of California-Davis School of Veterinary Medicine claims that this practice can be dangerous. Chomel and co-author, Ben Sun, of an article on the subject, have done an extensive search of medical journals and revealed an extensive list of possible pathogens that can lead to human illness.

The veterinarians are referring to zoonotic diseases – diseases caused by infectious agents such as parasites, bacteria or pathogens that can be transmitted between or are shared by animals and humans. Zoonosis is an infectious disease in animals that can be transmitted to people through parasites, bacteria, viruses, fungi and prions. Lyme Disease, Leptospirosis, Rabies, Chlamydiosis, Salmonella, are among zoonotic diseases along with the Bubonic plague, Anthrax and Cat-Scratch Disease.

For those of us who do enjoy sleeping with our pets, good hygiene is a great deterrent to sharing any of the above-mentioned conditions. Keeping our pets, clean, healthy, nutritionally sound, and up to date on their vaccinations is important. Keeping ourselves clean and healthy is also important as well as keeping our sheets and other bed linens clean.

Countless humans have slept with their pets for thousands of years with virtually no ill health effects. The elderly, very young and those who are immune compromised are among the most likely to be adversely affected by zoonotic diseases, but incidences of this occurring are rare.

My husband and I thoroughly enjoy sleeping with our dogs. We welcome their kisses and snuggling. But we do our best to keep them clean and healthy and ourselves as well as our bedding fresh and clean as well. If you are concerned, research zoonotic diseases, their symptoms, treatments and the ways in which they are transmitted. You may decide that it is better to keep Fido and Fluffy NEXT to rather than ON your bed!