**[The Pros and Cons of Microchipping Your Pet](http://forbetterpethealth.com/the-pros-and-cons-of-microchipping-your-pet/371604/)**

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Any pet owner who has lost their pet for even a short time knows the anguish of waiting for its return. While no one ever wants to think about losing their beloved friend, it can happen to even the most conscientious owners. A dog may bolt suddenly to chase after a squirrel, a door is left open by accident, or a cat may wander too far from home and get disoriented. It happens.

According to the American Humane Association, one out of every three pets will go missing during their lifetime, with only 17% of lost dogs and 2% of lost cats finding their way back to their original homeowners.

**What should pet owners do?**

The primary, most visible way of identification you should have for your dog or outdoor cat is a collar with rabies tags, city license tags, or ID tags that are imprinted with a phone number; however, pets can sometimes slip out of their collars or tags may fall off.

Disturbingly, the American Kennel Club reports that pet theft is up to 32%. The first thing a pet thief will do is discard pet collars and tags. As backup protection, many owners are choosing to microchip their pets.

**What is microchipping?**

Smaller than a grain of rice, microchips are tiny transponders that carry a tracking number linked with the owner’s contact information. Under the care of a veterinarian, a microchip is injected under the skin between the shoulders blades in seconds and is no more painful than a vaccination. The chip number and owner/pet information are registered with a national database once implanted. When veterinarians or animal control officials find a stray animal, it’s scanned to see if it is carrying a microchip. Within minutes of scanning the animal, a simple phone call unites worried owners with their pets.

**Does it work?**

While there are many stories of microchips reuniting pets with their owners, perhaps the most remarkable is the story of a calico cat named Willow. The cat disappeared from a home near the Rocky Mountains during a house renovation and had been lost for five years.

Owner Jamie Squires said the family had long ago given up any hope of finding Willow and were “shocked and astounded” when they got a call from New York’s Animal Care & Control. Willow had been found on East 20th Street by a man who took her to a shelter. Willow was then reunited with her owners, thanks to the microchip she received as a kitten.

**Are there risks?**

There are gaps in efficiency. Since there are multiple databases of pet microchip implant information, animal shelter employees may not automatically know which one to contact with an animal’s identification number to find its owner. Locating the right pet microchip implant database can be time-consuming.

Plus, not all pet microchip implants use the same radio frequency, so they can’t all be read with the same scanner. While a universal scanner has been developed which apparently reads all pet microchips, not all animal shelter have it. It may be difficult for a shelter to read the information on your pet’s microchip implant or possibly even determine if it has a microchip.

Finally, one study suggests microchip insertion may have caused cases of Feline Injection Sarcoma, an aggressive form of cancer, due to chronic inflammation at the vaccine injection site. These results were inconclusive though since other vaccines had also been given at the same site.

**Weighing the choices**

One veterinarian noted a pet getting lost is a far greater risk than possible cancer. “The risk of getting lost and ending up at the pound and maybe getting put to sleep is a bigger risk in the big picture,” said Dr. Nicholas Dodman, of the Tufts Cumming School of Veterinary Medicine.

Willow’s happy owners agree. “All our pets are microchipped,” the Squires said. “If we could microchip our kids, we would.”

*Advice from this column is not a substitute for professional medical attention. Please contact your own veterinarian if you suspect your pet may have eaten something other than their own food. Questions for future blogs can be submitted to* [*Dr. Melissa*](mailto:drmelissadvm@petnutritionproducts.com)*.*