

The Importance of Microchipping Your Pet

by

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I see a number of beautiful cats around my neighborhood. Most of them probably roam no farther than a few houses from their own address. However, every year at our veterinary practice we see a number of “found” cats with no identification on them. Who knows how far they have roamed from home or why they became lost in the first place? The bigger question is why those cats didn’t have some form of ID on them. This is something all cat lovers should be sure to take care of.

Some people may intentionally choose not to put a collar on their cat. Some just get tired of replacing the ones their cats keep slipping off; other people are convinced their roaming kitties will get caught on a tree branch by their collars and hang themselves.

Both groups are taking chances with their cats’ lives. Cat collars are inexpensive insurance against loss. It’s all about the importance of playing the odds. If you let your cat roam, give him a ticket home with ID.

Cat collars are made of lightweight material and designed to “give” enough to let your cat wriggle free should the collar ever catch on something. Don’t get a puppy collar by mistake: dog collars are meant to prevent escapes, and cat collars are made to allow them. The fit should be snug, but not uncomfortably so.

Once you’ve got the right collar, order a tag. ID tags come in high-impact plastic in a variety of colors and shapes or in metal, also in many varieties, such as circles, cat’s heads, reflectors and so on. If the tag doesn’t have room for all your phone numbers, then don’t bother with putting your cat’s name on it, because in order for someone to be close enough to read it and call your cat, they will have already captured him. That person will, however, need a contact phone number for you. Instead, use the space for a couple of extra phone numbers so someone who finds your cat can locate you or a friend, neighbor or relative day or night. If you’re concerned about dangling tags, look for those that attach flat to the collar.

Some communities require free-roaming cats to be licensed as a way to offset the costs of handling strays and to ensure compliance with local rabies-vaccination requirements. To find out if your community is one of these with licensing requirements for cats, call your local animal-control agency. In Contra Costa and Alameda counties, licenses for outdoor cats are not required.

Microchips are a form of ID that has come on strong in recent years, but they work best as a complement to tags, not a replacement for them. The microchip is permanent

identification no bigger than a grain of rice, which your veterinarian imbeds under the skin over your cat's shoulder blades by injecting it through a needle. The chip, encased in a nonreactive glass casing, contains a unique identifying number that can be read by a scanner (about the size of a TV remote).

The number on the chip and the name of your cat along with your contact information is registered in a national database. If your cat (or dog) is found by an animal shelter or a veterinarian with a scanner, they can be quickly identified and you can be contacted.

Remember, though, that most lost pets are found not by shelter staffers but by neighbors, and neighbors don't have microchip scanners in their collection of home appliances.

Which is why although I highly recommend a microchip for permanent ID of your cat, I also advise you to be sure he or she wears a collar and tag at all times, too.