

# Failing to Give Your Pet This Could Be a Choice You Regret

This is a vital step to take to avoid regrets. But one of today's most trendy methods carries risks most people don't know about - including sarcomas and fibrosarcomas. Meaning you might avoid short-term regret, but induce long-term regret. Know before you decide.

**Analysis by [Dr. Karen Shaw Becker](#)**

## STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- April 19 - 25, 2015 is National Pet Identification Week. It's a good reminder for pet guardians to insure all furry family members have current, legible ID tags or some other form of identification to help them find their way home in the event they are lost
- Microchipping is an increasingly popular permanent method of identifying animals, and many dogs and cats adopted from shelters and rescues, as well as purebreds purchased from breeders, come to their new family already chipped
- For those considering microchipping, there are pros and cons to consider. It's up to each pet guardian to weigh the benefits against the risks and make an informed decision based on your pet's individual personality and lifestyle
- Another way to permanently ID your pet is a tattoo. This method, too, has pros and cons depending on your individual situation, and it's important to make an informed decision for your pet

***Editor's Note: This article is a reprint. It was originally published April 20, 2015.***

This week is National Pet Identification Week, which is a great reminder to all pet parents to insure your dog, cat or other companion animal is equipped with up-to-date ID information in the event he gets separated from you. Sadly, the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) found that while 80% of pet owners realize the importance of ID tags, just 33% say their pet always wears one.<sup>1</sup>

If you're among the majority of pet guardians who aren't always as disciplined as you would like to be about ID tags, the good news is that tags aren't the only way to identify your pet in the event she is lost. There are actually several other methods for identifying dogs and cats, including GPS tracking devices, radio frequency identification devices, microchips, and tattoos. The most popular method for ID'ing pets, second only to ID tags, is microchipping.

## How Microchipping Works

The pet microchip is about the size of a grain of rice. It is injected under the skin in the neck area between the shoulders, and provides a permanent means of identifying your pet.

Microchip placement is very similar to a vaccination. A bit of loose skin between the animal's shoulder blades is gently pulled up, and the needle containing the chip is inserted. The trigger is depressed, injecting the microchip beneath the skin.

Each chip is equipped with an electromagnetic transponder with a unique code that must be registered with a recovery program like HomeAgain or **Avid**. Before it is placed, the chip is scanned while still in the package to validate that the identification code of the transponder matches the code printed on the package label. Once inserted in your pet, it is scanned again to verify that it can be read.

If a pet is lost, most veterinary offices, shelters, and humane societies have scanners that can locate the chip inside the animal's body and read the code on it. So as long as your pet's microchip has been registered and your information is up-to-date in the recovery program database, the vet clinic or shelter should be able to reunite you with your furry family member.

## **Pros and Cons of Microchipping**

Microchips have become extremely popular. Many shelters now implant chips in every animal before he or she goes home with a new family. And chips have become a standard method of identifying strays. Any lost animal brought to a veterinary clinic or animal shelter is automatically scanned for at least the two most common brands (HomeAgain and Avid). The primary benefit of microchipping is, of course, that your pet can't lose his ID.

One drawback is that the insertion of the chip can be a bit painful like any injection. When I'm asked to insert a microchip, which is rare, I always use a local anesthetic to alleviate any discomfort.

Another potential disadvantage is that chips have been known to migrate away from the injection site, which makes them more difficult to locate with a scanner. Also, there are several microchip manufacturers, but to my knowledge, there's no universal scanner that reads every brand of chip.

Another extremely important point to remember about microchips is that your pet's chip must be registered to be of any use, and your contact information must be kept up to date in the recovery program database for the same reason.

Also, the people doing the scanning must know how to correctly and thoroughly scan a pet to locate a microchip — especially one that may have migrated away from the injection site.

## **Health Concerns Related to Microchips**

The primary concern any time something foreign is introduced into the body — whether it's a microchip or, say, a metal plate to repair a fractured bone, or a transplanted organ — is the potential for the body to reject the foreign material.

There have been documented cases in veterinary medicine of sarcomas or fibrosarcomas (soft tissue tumors) developing at microchip injection sites. Research shows that between 1996 and 2006, between 0.8% and 10.2% of laboratory animals developed malignant tumors around or near implanted microchips. There are also two documented cases of chip-related malignancies in dogs.<sup>2</sup>

My recommendation, if you're considering chipping your pet, is to assess how much risk there is that she will ever get out of your sight. If you have an indoor-only cat, for example, or a well-trained (responsive) dog that is always on a leash outdoors, I believe the potential risks of microchipping outweigh the benefits.

## **An Alternative to Microchipping: A Permanent Tattoo**

This method of ID'ing your pet involves tattooing a unique code or information on the inner pinna (ear flap), the tummy or inner leg of a mature (fully grown) pet. Ideally, ID tattoos are done while an animal is under anesthesia for another procedure. Otherwise, a sedative and local anesthesia should be used.

Tattooing is the method I use to permanently identify my pets. I put my phone number (which hasn't changed in a very long time) on their inner thighs. Obviously, if your phone number or other personal information changes frequently, this may not be a good option for you.

Another potential downside is that you have to hope the person who finds your pet knows to look for a tattoo, and this is especially challenging if your pet is very furry. In this case, the earflap is a better location for a tattoo, but many people don't like earflap markings for aesthetic reasons.

You can increase the likelihood of your tattooed pet being returned by registering the number with **AKC Reunite**, the National Dog Registry, or Tattoo-a-Pet. Any number can be registered with the National Dog Registry, and all tattooed animals can be enrolled in AKC Reunite program regardless of species, age, size or number used.

A drawback to a tattoo is that it may fade or blur over time and become difficult to read. Another layer of black ink can be applied to restore the tattoo.

Each method for ID'ing your pet has pros and cons, so the ultimate decision is yours and should be based on your pet's personality and lifestyle, as well as your comfort level with the identification method you choose for your furry family member.

I recommend that every pet have a standard up-to-date ID collar or tag in addition to whatever other ID method their owner chooses, since the easiest, fastest way for someone who has found your pet to find you, is to take a quick look at the contact info contained on his tag or collar.

## **Sources and References**

[Webvet](#)

<sup>1</sup> [ASPCA.org](#)

<sup>2</sup> [AntiChips.com](#)

---