

# Too Many Pets Are Permanently Lost This Way

A full 80% of pet parents believe it's of crucial importance. Yet only 33% make sure they always protect their pets in one of these priority ways. Add these 4 words for a near magical outcome. It's time to become one of the 67% who express their TLC this way.

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

## STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- National Pet ID Week, from April 16 to April 22, was a yearly reminder to ensure we were doing all we can to insure our pets could be easily returned to us if they were lost.
- One in 3 pets will become lost at some point in their lives, so a good rule to live by is "never say never" when it comes to the possibility that your beloved animal companion could go missing
- In addition to standard ID tags for pets, other methods for identifying your dog or cat include permanent tattooing, microchipping, specialty tags such as digital ID tags and USB ID tags and tracking devices

***Editor's Note: This article is a reprint. It was originally published April 17, 2017.***

It's National Pet ID Week, which means it's time for a quick review of your furry family member's prospects for making it back home to you in the event he or she is lost.

And in case you're thinking, "I never let my pet out of my sight, so there's no way she'll ever get lost," you should know that the odds are actually quite a bit higher than "never" that at some point in your animal companion's life, you'll lose track of her.

PetHub, a company that makes digital pet ID tags, provides some eye-opening statistics about lost pets:<sup>1</sup>

- 1 in 3 pets will become lost in their lifetime
- Less than 2% of lost cats and only 15% to 20% of lost dogs make it back home to their families (per the National Council on Pet Population Study and Policy)
- Most pets who do get home are wearing an ID tag or are microchipped or tattooed
- 80% of pet parents believe pet ID tags are crucially important, but only 33% report that their pet always wears one (per the ASPCA)

If you're one of the two-thirds of pet owners who isn't religious about keeping an ID tag on your pet, it might be helpful to know there are several other methods for identifying dogs and cats.

## 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 your tattooed pet will be returned to you 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 the 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.

## Microchips

Microchips are about the size of a grain of rice. They are injected under the skin in the neck area between the shoulders, and provide 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. I don't get many requests for microchipping, but since the injection can be a bit painful, when I'm asked to place one, I always use a local anesthetic.

Each chip is equipped with an electromagnetic transponder with a unique code that must be registered with a recovery program like HomeAgain or **Avid**. 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.

As long as your pet's microchip has been registered and your information is up-to-date in the recovery program database, the chip has not migrated too far from the injection site and the person scanning for the chip has the correct scanning device and knows what he or she is doing, it should be relatively easy to reunite you with your furry family member.

It's important to know that the **safety of microchips** has been a concern for many pet guardians and many of us in the holistic veterinary community. Although very rare, tumors have been associated with implanting foreign objects in pets.

For a very current update on the pros and cons of microchips, including issues surrounding the universality and accuracy of chip scanning devices, my friend Dr. Jean Dodds at Hemopet and NutriScan recently posted an in-depth article I encourage you to read: "[\*\*Microchipping Pets\*\*](#)."

## ID Tags

- **Standard ID tags** — A standard pet ID tag is made of plastic or metal and dangles off your pet's collar or harness.

Tags are engraved with owner contact info — usually just a phone number due to space constraints — and either the pet's name or a short phrase like "Needs Meds" or "HUGE Reward for Return" (which I prefer).

The benefits of this type of tag are the cost and the fact that a Good Samaritan who finds your pet can call you immediately as long as your current phone number, including area code, is engraved on the tag.

It's also a good idea to have a backup phone number engraved below yours in case you can't be immediately reached for some reason.

A drawback to standard ID tags is that the engraving can wear off over time, making the tag impossible to read. There's also the need to be diligent in keeping the tag updated with your current contact information, and insuring your pet is never, ever without her collar or harness.

- **Digital ID tags** — These are ID tags or collars that are linked to an online subscription service (PetHub is one) and have the added advantage of being "scannable" with a smartphone.

You need to have an online profile of your pet linked to the tag or collar. There are options to have additional information on the tag or collar, and there are basic (free) and premium (paid) subscription levels.

- **USB ID tags** — These are USB thumb/flash drives that attach to your pet's collar or harness like a standard ID tag, and can store complete care information for your pet.

It's a good idea to do some research and read reviews of the various brands available, because some have more options than others. Another consideration is the person who finds your pet will need to have access to a computer and know what to do with the USB thumb/flash drive in order to ID your pet and find you.

## GPS Tracking Devices

GPS trackers are designed more for owners who want to monitor the comings and goings of an off-leash pet than for people hoping to recover a lost dog or cat. These devices don't identify your pet if someone finds him — their purpose is to help you pinpoint his location if he ventures past the "virtual fences" you set up as alerts.

This type of device can be a good investment if you spend time engaging in outdoor activities with your dog off-leash. If you happen to live on a large piece of property and your pet has the run of the place, it might also come in handy.

Another situation in which it might be useful is if your pet is a habitual runner or escape artist. Obviously, in that case, your pet needs some intensive behavior modification to curb her tendency to run off, but a GPS device might offer an added measure of security.

## Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) Devices

RFID pet tags and collars are essentially microchips your pet wears rather than has implanted. More akin to GPS trackers than a way to help recover a lost pet, RFID devices help you find or keep your pet within a certain roaming range. Audio and visual clues point you in the direction of your pet's location.

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

<sup>1</sup> [PetHub](#)

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