

Microchips save Pets' Lives!

Microchips are an inexpensive way to return lost pets to their owners, while reversing the heartbreaking fact that most lost or stolen pets are otherwise never reunited with their families. The Humane Society of the United States estimates that more than 10 million pets are lost or stolen every year, and, tragically, more than 3 million of these animals are euthanized at shelters. The other 7 million pets typically are kept by the people that found them when their owners could not be found. Only about one in five dogs taken to shelters are returned to their owners, but that number increases to more than 50 percent when the pets have microchips and are registered. The statistics are much worse for cats brought to shelters, with only 2 percent without microchips returned to their original owners. That figure increases to 38 percent if the cats have been microchipped and registered.

What a Microchip Is.....and Is Not

A microchip is about the size of a grain of rice, is biocompatible and is administered as easily as getting a vaccine injection. What's more, it can be implanted without anesthesia by a veterinarian at a low cost. The microchip contains a unique identification number, but it is not a GPS that locates missing pets, as some people mistakenly believe. The pet owner has to register that number with a database for a reasonable fee and store information, such as his or her name, telephone number and address, in the microchip company's database. All humane societies, animal shelters and veterinary offices have universal readers that can read the identification

number of the microchip. It is vital that owners register their microchip otherwise it will not help reunite a lost pet with its owners. The American Microchip Advisory Council for Animals is working to create an umbrella database that includes information from different microchip manufacturers. This is similar to work that was done to make universal readers that can recognize different types and frequencies of microchips. Until the umbrella database is finalized, however, be sure to ask your veterinarian to use one of the prominent companies that is most well known.

The microchip that I use at my office is manufactured with high-quality materials made to last 25 years and incorporates technology that keeps the microchip from moving around under the skin of the pet. While it is standard practice to place the microchip between a pet's shoulder blades, lower quality chips have been found under their front legs, by their tails and even in their paws. Animal health workers know to scan the entire body of recovered pets, but it is comforting to know that your pet's microchip will stay where it is supposed to. The company I use also allows for changes in your information to be made at any time during the life of your pet after paying just a one-time, initial fee. This allows you to update your information if you move and also to add medical information if needed that could alert your pet's rescuers to his or her medical and dietary needs. This particular company also includes a "Lost Pet Recovery Network" and "Rapid Lost Pet Alerts" that go out to shelters, rescuers and veterinarians in which your pet has been lost. Some companies, including the one I use, offer even more services, such as a Medical Emergency and Poison Control Hotline for an additional annual fee, but the basic premise of reuniting lost pets and their owners

is the primary and truly wonderful service that counts. These companies even allow other microchips to be registered and take advantage of their services.

Although nothing will get a lost pet home as quickly as having your name and telephone number on a tag or collar -and you should definitely continue to do this- it is a fact that tags can fall off, and pets can lose their collars. Losing a pet can happen so quickly when you least expect it and in so many different ways. I hear stories of pets digging under fences, bolting from panic during a storm, wandering away when traveling or escaping when someone leaves a door open by mistake. And, of course, there are many tales of pets that have been stolen. Microchipping substantially increases the likelihood that pets will be returned home by offering secure, reliable, unique and permanent identification to help bring lost pets home and provide peace of mind that your beloved companion will never wander alone. I urge you to contact your veterinarian and inquire about microchipping your pet today.