

# The value of microchipping

*Quick identification of a “stray” can lead to a happy reunion when pets go missing. The other possible outcomes are not quite so cheerful.*

It seems almost sci-fi: implanting a computer chip in living tissue and coding that chip to a central database. Many of your clients may be squeamish, even a little suspicious, about the concept. What is this—1984? Yet as more and more pets are “chipped,” more and more stories with happy endings are cropping up when animals and owners are reunited.

Dr. Kevin Concannon, DACVA, co-founder of Veterinary Specialty Hospital of the Carolinas (VSH) in Cary, N.C., says his emergency hospital sees quite a few pets brought in as “strays,” either healthy or injured. The presence of a microchip can mean the owner is at the hospital minutes later to pick up the pet, or is able to give the go-ahead for a life-saving surgery or blood transfusion. “In the type of work that we do,” Dr. Concannon says, “microchipping definitely helps us a lot.”

## Benefits of the chip

Any unidentified animal brought in to VSH is routinely scanned for a microchip, Dr. Concannon says. In one case, a whippet spooked by a thunderstorm found its way into a random neighborhood garage. The homeowner brought the dog to VSH, “we scanned it, and the owner came in 15 minutes later to pick up the pet,” Dr. Concannon says. Here are some other advantages he sees to microchipping:

> **Approval to treat.** When an unidentified injured animal is brought to VSH, the healthcare team routinely stabilizes the patient, provides appropriate pain relief, and bandages any wounds. Beyond that, they need owner input. “If an animal deteriorates and there’s no one to take responsibility, it might have to be euthanized,” Dr. Concannon says. “If we can contact the owner quickly, that’s important to the pet’s care.”

> **Permanence.** Collars and tags can be easily removed, Dr. Concannon says. Obviously a Good Samaritan won’t do this, but someone less scrupulous might. Plus, many cats don’t like collars or their owners worry about a collar getting caught and causing injury—microchipping is great in these cases. “My own cats are

🔍

## Look online

### All about microchipping Information from your veterinarian

**What is a microchip?**  
The microchip is a tiny computer chip, about the size of a grain of rice, programmed with an identification number. The chip is enclosed in biocompatible glass and is small enough to fit into a hypodermic needle. Once an animal is injected with a chip, it can be identified throughout its life with the use of a hand scanner.

**Does my pet have to be sedated to be implanted with a microchip?**  
No. Injecting a microchip is just like any other injection or vaccination. Anesthesia is not required or recommended.

**Could my pet be allergic to the microchip?**  
The microchip is inert, smooth, nontoxic, and non-allergenic. Microchip companies say there is simply no chance of the body developing an allergy or trying to reject the microchip.

**If a veterinary clinic or animal shelter finds a microchip, how will they know who to call?**  
Animal shelters and veterinarians are feeding chips in more and more pets. They are aware of the national registries and routinely contact them to obtain owner information regarding the pet. They then contact owners to advise them that their pet has been found.

**I have tiny toy breeds—can I still have them implanted?**  
Absolutely. The same-size microchip and needle are used in pets even smaller than puppies and toy breeds, including mice, baby birds, and even fish.

**How do I update information in the registration?**  
After your pet is chipped, you will be given information about how to contact the national registry to update your information. Remember to do this whenever you change your address or telephone number.

**Do shelters scan animals for microchips?**  
Yes, scanning pets for microchips has become standard practice in animal shelters. Some municipalities, such as Los Angeles County in California, are even requiring pets to be microchipped, so local governments can cooperate with shelters to reunite pets and owners.

**Does implanting the microchip hurt my pet?**  
Most pets react the same way to this shot as they do to any other. The microchip contains nothing that will burn or irritate tissue; it's completely biocompatible.

**How is the microchip implanted?**  
Microchips are implanted with a needle beneath the skin between the shoulder blades. They can't be felt or seen.

**How early can puppies or kittens be injected with a microchip?**  
Young pets can be microchipped as early as 4 to 6 weeks of age.

**How long does the microchip last?**  
The microchip has no power supply battery or moving parts, and it's designed to last the life of the pet. Once injected, the microchip is anchored in place as a thin layer of connective tissue forms around it. It requires no care and will not pass through or out of the body.

**What's the benefit of microchipping my pet?**  
Microchips are permanent and can't be lost, altered, or destroyed. Pet owners have been reunited with chipped pets that have been missing for years or that have traveled thousands of miles.

**How does microchip identification work?**  
A special scanner is used to send a radio signal to the chip to read the identification number. The pet feels nothing when the scanner is placed over it. The number is displayed on the scanner, and the person reading the scanner can contact a national registry to find out who the pet belongs to.

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Source: Los Angeles County Department of Animal Care and Control

Visit the **Forms** section of [vetecon.com](http://vetecon.com) to download these answers to frequently asked questions about microchipping.

microchipped even though they’re strictly indoor—just in case they ever get out,” Dr. Concannon says.

> **Easy updating.** With a traditional collar and tag, owners who move must order new tags and often wait for them to be inscribed. Most microchip companies, on the other hand, offer updates with one phone call or online visit. That said, clients do need to be reminded to keep their contact information current. VSH has run into problems with out-of-date information, Dr. Concannon says, though it’s still helpful to have the pet owner’s name.

## Educating pet owners

If you’ve explained the benefits and your clients still aren’t sure about microchipping, they might have some misconceptions about how the chip works or whether it’s safe. Use a frequently asked questions handout (see above) to make sure these clients are informed—and have the best chance of keeping their pets for a lifetime. ■

# All about microchipping *Information from your veterinarian*

## What is a microchip?

The microchip is a tiny computer chip, about the size of a grain of rice, programmed with an identification number. The chip is enclosed in biocompatible glass and is small enough to fit into a hypodermic needle. Once an animal is injected with a chip, it can be identified throughout its life with this one-of-a-kind number.

## What's the benefit of microchipping my pet?

Microchips are permanent and can't be lost, altered, or destroyed. Pet owners have been reunited with chipped pets that have been missing for years or that have traveled thousands of miles.

## How does microchip identification work?

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## How early can puppies or kittens be injected with a microchip?

Young pets can be microchipped as early as 6 to 8 weeks of age.

## How long does the microchip last?

The microchip has no power supply, battery, or moving parts, and it's designed to last the life of the pet. Once injected, the microchip is anchored in place as a thin layer of connective tissue forms around it. It requires no care and will not pass through or out of the body.

## Does implanting the microchip hurt my pet?

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## Does my pet have to be sedated to be implanted with a microchip?

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## Could my pet be allergic to the microchip?

The microchip is inert, smooth, nontoxic, and non-allergenic. Microchip companies say there is virtually no chance of the body developing an allergy or trying to reject the microchip.

## If a veterinary clinic or animal shelter finds a microchip, how will they know who to call?

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