

I'M LOST: WHY MICROCHIPS ARE SO IMPORTANT

When Linda and her dogs moved to a new town, she was sure to call her microchip registration company to let them know her new address and phone number. She's glad she did: A month after the move, her Siberian husky Joy ran out the door and disappeared into the new neighborhood. Shaver put up "lost dog" flyers in English and Spanish and called local animal shelters, but there was no news of Joy.



Then on April 21, 2015, nearly five full months after Joy had run away, Linda got an incredible phone call. Thanks to a microchip, Joy had been found. Linda learned Joy had been living with a homeless man until he offered her to a passerby, saying he couldn't care for her anymore. The woman took Joy to a pet shop to be scanned for a microchip, and the AAHA's Universal Pet Microchip Lookup Tool was used to easily find Shaver's contact information and called with the happy news about Joy.

Linda and Joy have one of many happy pet reunion stories enabled by a microchip. Microchips have reunited almost half a million pets with their families. A microchip is a device about the size of a grain of rice implanted by a veterinary professional between a pet's shoulder blades that has a unique ID number. Most animal hospitals and shelters can scan lost pets to see if they have a microchip and if so, find the owner's contact information.

Because microchipping is a part of excellent pet care, in 2013, the American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA) and the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) co-founded Check the Chip Day, which is celebrated annually on August 15.

What's the first thing to do if you find a lost cat or dog? Head to an AAHA-accredited veterinary hospital or local animal shelter to have him scanned for a microchip.

If the pet is microchipped, the veterinarian can contact the owners, provided the chip's contact information is current. If they don't have a chip, it's more complicated. Spencer suggests putting up "found pet" signs in the neighborhood as well as online on Facebook and other social media sites.

We also recommend checking with the local animal control office to find out the laws regarding found animals. For instance, in some areas, a pet must stay at an animal shelter for five days before the pet can be adopted to a new home (or by the person who found him). This allows the original owners a chance to find their pet in the shelter.

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And if the owner and pet are reunited thanks to your efforts, you just might recommend microchipping to help avoid another scare.

One study of 7,704 stray animals at shelters found that dogs without microchips were only reunited to their owners 21.9 percent of the time. Dogs with a microchip were reunited 52.2 percent of the time. In cats, they were 20 times more likely to be reunited with their owners (yes – 20 times!).

But a microchip is virtually useless without up-to-date contact information, so Check the Chip Day is a reminder to make sure your pet's information is current with the registry.

If your pet's microchip doesn't have your updated contact information, it really decreases the chances of your pet being able to return to you. If somebody finds your pet and they can't get in touch with you, a lot of times the pet will end up in the shelter or in a different home. It's important that if you make the effort to microchip your pet, that you also make the effort to keep that information up to date.”

Check the Chip Day is also an opportunity to call your veterinarian and ask him or her to scan your pet to make sure the microchip is still reading correctly. Visiting the practice for a simple microchip scan provides a positive veterinary experience for your pet.

They just have a scanner passed over them and it's a really painless experience. It's a great excuse to just say hi to the veterinarian.

There is the misconception that microchips have GPS tracking abilities, but that is not the case. Another is that implantation hurts, though it actually is no more painful than a typical injection.

Getting the microchip placed is just like a regular vaccine. It doesn't require any surgery or anesthesia, and it can easily be done during a regular office visit. It's pretty simple and it doesn't bother your pet once it's in place, so it's kind of a no brainer.

Ultimately, Check the Chip Day is about keeping pets where they belong, at home with their loving owners.

Microchipping helps strengthen the human-animal bond because it keeps pets and their families together.