

Study: 3 out of 4 cats will wear a collar, making it worth a try

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Almost three out of four cats in a new study wore collars consistently during a six-month study, suggesting that most cats will tolerate a collar even if their owners are skeptical about its success.

In fact, in almost 60 percent of cases, the animals' tolerance of collars exceeded owners' expectations that their cat would keep the collar on without much trouble.

The researchers suggest that, armed with this data, veterinarians should include a discussion about the importance of identification during annual wellness exams of pet cats. They also say microchipping cats remains a useful backup identification method.

Among other lessons learned from the research: Proper fitting, with room for two fingers between the neck and the collar, is critical. And owners should carefully observe their cats' behavior with new collars for the first few days, when problems apparently are more common as the cats adjust.

Convincing cat owners that their pets, even indoor-only cats, need identification is "a tremendous uphill battle," said Linda Lord, assistant professor of veterinary preventive medicine at Ohio State University and lead author of the study.

"A lot of people start out with the dogma that cats can't wear collars, that they won't tolerate them or that they're dangerous. Now pet owners can

look at this research and, if they own a cat, maybe they will now consider that they will be able to put identification on them. A collar with an ID tag is probably a cat's greatest chance of ever being re-homed or brought back if it is lost."

And indoor-only cats can get lost. Lord's recommendations from this study are informed in part by her previous research, which has found, for example, that 40 percent of lost cats in one community were indoor-only cats, or that free-roaming cats without collars are very likely to either be fed by strangers - reducing the likelihood that they will return home - or to be ignored as strays.

"The return-to-owner rate is abysmal for cats. Fewer than 2 percent of lost cats are returned to their owners," she said. "If we could get cat owners to try using a collar with identification, it would be a big deal."

The study is published in a recent issue of the *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*.

The researchers recruited cat owners from the colleges of veterinary medicine at Ohio State, the University of Florida, Texas A&M University and Cornell University. Cats were randomly assigned to wear one of three types of collars: plastic buckle collars, buckle collars designed to detach if they become caught on something, or elastic stretch safety collars.

A total of 538 cats with 338 owners participated in the study. Of those, 391 cats, or 72.7 percent, wore their collars for the entire six-month study period.

Thirty-two animals were withdrawn from the study for various reasons. Owners of the 115 cats that did not successfully wear collars for six months reported the following reasons: The cat lost the collar (7.1

percent); the cat scratched excessively at the collar (4.8 percent); the collar continued to come off and the owner chose not to replace it (3.3 percent); or the collar got stuck in the cat's mouth or on another object (1.5 percent).

Relatively few collars did come off, however. A total of 333 cats wore their collars without incident for the entire six months.

A statistical analysis of research participants' answers to a series of survey questions indicated that cat owners' perception about how their cat would tolerate the collar had a predictive effect on the study outcome. The results showed that cats were significantly more likely to fail to wear a collar for six months if their owners did not expect they would accept the collar extremely or moderately well or if the collar came off and had to be put back on more than once.

"Part of the success of a cat wearing a collar is the expectation of the owner. For some owners, if a collar came off once, they were done. Some put the collar back on their cat five or six times," Lord said. "For the Houdini cat that can constantly get the collar off, it may just not work for them. A cat can also lose a collar, and then an owner has to decide whether to replace it."

Overall, owners' expectations were exceeded, with owners of 303 of the cats (56.3 percent) saying their pets tolerated the collars better than expected and owners of 167 cats (31 percent) saying their cats behaved as expected. Owners of 43 cats (8 percent) said their pets' behavior with the collars was worse than they expected.

For those pet owners who are concerned that collars on cats can be dangerous, Lord noted that the study did indicate that there can be some risk associated with the collars. In 3.3 percent of cases involving 18 cats, the collars got caught on the animal's mouth or forelimb, or on another

object.

"I would never say that something like this can't happen," Lord said. "I would make an argument that a cat is much more likely to get lost and not be recovered than it is to be injured by a collar."

All of the enrolled cats also were microchipped for the study. Of the 478 cats scanned for microchip detection at the end of the study, three had microchips that had migrated away from the implantation region under the skin between the shoulder blades. Lord said that, especially for cats that cannot tolerate a collar, a microchip is an important and reliable form of identification in case the pets are lost.

Owners of 90 percent of the cats told researchers they planned to keep the collars on their cats after completion of the study. Most of the 25 cat owners not planning to continue using collars attributed their decision to either problems with the collar or the fact their [cats](#) stayed indoors.

Provided by The Ohio State University

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