

## Medical Notes

### Microchips & Your Pet

InTown Veterinary Group is dedicated to providing clients with an unparalleled range of veterinary care options.

The doctors at Bulger Animal Hospital & Essex County Veterinary Referral Hospital are always on hand no matter how seemingly small the question. We care about you and your pets. No question is too small. If you're worried, call us.

---

**Bulger Animal Hospital:**

247 Chickering Road,  
N. Andover, MA 01845

**Phone:**  
(978) 682-9905

**24-Hr Emergency:**  
(978) 725-5544

[www.InTownBulger.com](http://www.InTownBulger.com)

Our beloved pets play a large role in our daily lives, so finding out that your pet is missing can have a devastating impact on a family. Depending upon the circumstances under which he or she goes missing, collars and identification tags can become separated from your pet. So even if a Good Samaritan finds a missing dog or cat and contacts the authorities to find the owners, there is often little anyone can do without a collar or tags. According to the American Humane Association, fewer than 17% of lost dogs and only 2% of lost cats are reunited with their owners. Given these percentages, alternative methods of identification become necessary. One such type of identification is microchipping.

Microchips are the size of a grain of rice; they contain a database reference number and are implanted under the skin. When a stray animal is presented to an animal hospital, shelter, animal control officer or humane society, a microchip scanner is used to determine if a chip is present. If one is found, the reference number is checked against the database and an owner can be contacted. Ideally, that database will have updated owner contact information. However, this can only be done if the owner registers their pet into that database.

The most important step in the process of safeguarding your pet with a microchip is registering the chip. Without registration, the chip cannot be linked to the owner or anyone else. This step involves filling out a form and paying a processing fee.



Fig. 1: A microchip & grains of rice



Fig. 2: A handheld microchip scanner

Placing a microchip is an easy, relatively painless process. It can be carried out during a routine surgical procedure or annual physical exam. The microchip is implanted by injection. Once injected, pets do not seem aware of their presence. Microchips never need maintenance or repair. Many shelters have begun placing microchips prior to adoption; registration information goes home with the new family.

Please contact your veterinarian at Bulger Animal Hospital for more information or to answer any questions regarding microchipping, and the benefits to your pet.

*For more information, feel free to use the medical index on our website. [www.InTownBulger.com](http://www.InTownBulger.com), then click "Medical Index".*

# Cat Corner

## Indoor or Outdoor

### Where Should Your Cat be?

There are cats that love to be outside, whether it is to prowl around nocturnally, chase birds, or bask in the sun. Other cats are perfectly content to remain inside in the comfort of a warm bed, away from an outdoor world that is scary and overwhelming.

While your cat's preferences may be clear, which one of the two, is actually the better choice? Looking at the issue more closely reveals that while some cats enjoy the outdoors, it is much safer and better for their overall health for them to stay indoors.

Let us first consider the fact that indoor cats live longer lives. Cats who live outdoors have an average life-span of between 2 to 5 years. This is compared to the 12-15 years (or even longer) healthy indoor cats may be expected to live.

Considering the number of dangers outdoor cats face, this average life span data makes sense. Outdoor cats can get lost, caught in traps, hit by cars, they can ingest poisonous substances or plants, and may be harmed by people, predators and other cats. In addition, outdoor cats have the highest incidence of infectious diseases, such as FIV (Feline Immunodeficiency Virus), FeLV (Feline Leukemia Virus) and FIP (Feline Infectious Peritonitis). These diseases only afflict cats, are transmitted through contact with infected cats, and result in eventual death due to a compromised immune system.

Cats can also transmit diseases to people, including rabies, toxoplasmosis (a parasite dangerous to pregnant women and their unborn babies), intestinal parasites, fleas and ticks. Keeping cats inside can help protect them from harm, disease and poisoning.

Some people would argue that it is cruel to keep cats inside when they clearly want to be outside, whether it is to hunt, explore, or to just have fun. However, cats have been domesticated for thousands of years. They no longer "need" to hunt. Unlike true wild cats, domesticated cats roam for fun, and if they do hunt, they rarely kill and eat their prey like a true predator would. Most cats that enjoy the outdoors enjoy the variety of stimulants available in the outside world, beyond that, domesticated cats do not have innate reasons for wanting to be outdoors.

The best way to ensure your cat is happy and content while indoors is to provide him or her with a stimulating environment.

This can be done by keeping curtains drawn and making sure that cats have safe ledges to perch on. You can purchase pots of edible plants for cats to chew on, such as grass or catnip. Make sure that the cat has plenty of safe and stimulating toys, scratching posts and towers to climb on so they can entertain themselves. Most importantly, play and interact with your cat as often as you can.



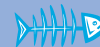
Outdoor cats can be turned into content indoor cats, but it does take time and patience. The best way is to start by letting the cat outside only during the day, and gradually shortening the length of time that the cat is outside. Again, it is important to provide the cat with plenty of love, attention and cat-friendly diversions to keep them occupied while indoors.

You can still take them on supervised trips outside, whether it is in a safely enclosed area or by teaching them to walk on a leash. Finally, you can also consult with your veterinarian or an animal behaviorist if you have specific questions about your cat's behavior and ways to help him or her make the adjustment to being an indoor cat.

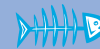
The choice you make for your cat is ultimately your decision. However, with so many dangers to your cat in the outside world, it does not seem worth the risk to let him or her roam free. By keeping cats inside, or even with supervised time outside, their chances for living long, happy and healthy lives are statistically, significantly higher.

#### Things to Remember:

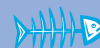
Continue applying flea and tick preventatives through the fall for outdoor cats.



Make boarding appointments for the holidays as early as possible.



Consider having your outdoor cat microchipped.



## Dog Safety

As a nation, we love our dogs. They provide us with so many joys: love, companionship, and laughter to name a few. In turn, we lavish them with luxuries and affection. So it is heartbreaking to see dogs become severely injured or even die from accidents that, in hindsight, could have been avoided. Fortunately, there are simple measures you can take to help keep your pets safe.

### Motor Vehicle Accidents

Also known as being "hit by car," this is among the most common summer-time pet ailments. Dogs and cats are both at risk, and injuries can range from a few scrapes, to severe, life-threatening lung damage, brain trauma and fractures.

It is rare to see a pet hit by a car while wearing a leash. For your dog's safety, we recommend that dogs be leashed or kept in an escape-proof fenced yard at all times when outdoors. Securely close your gates. Make sure your dog cannot jump over the fence, or dig underneath to get out, and keep an eye on your dog while he/she is outside.

Spaying and neutering your pets will also reduce the number of escape attempts. Obedience training is another weapon in your safety arsenal. Obedient dogs are much easier to control than their non-obedient counterparts.

### Things to Remember:

Continue seasonal heartworm medications at least through October.



Continue applying tick preventatives - ticks love the fall weather!



Make boarding appointments for the holidays early.



Keep antifreeze away from dogs when prepping cars for the winter.

### Heat Stroke

Most owners know that their pets cannot sweat aside from through a few lonely sweat glands on the feet. Most owners see their dogs (and occasionally cats) panting on a hot day, however, did you know that heat stroke can affect dogs at temperatures as low as 80 degrees Fahrenheit?

It makes simple common sense to keep pets inside on sweltering hot July and August days, yet pets still need to be safeguarded in the spring and fall when temperatures are more moderate.



To protect pets from the summer heat, dogs should be monitored closely any time they are outside. Excessive panting, searching for a place in the shade, weakness, and excessive drinking are all signs that the dog should come inside or visit the vet. Don't take dogs for long walks or runs when it is hot and/or humid, restrict this exercise to the early morning or evening. And never leave your dog in the car unattended. Even with the windows down, temperatures can quickly reach over 140 degrees.

### Toxins

Just like children, pets get into things. Depending on the toxin and the amounts ingested, symptoms can be extremely variable. Some toxins are lethal even in small doses. In light of this, it is important to keep both human and pet medications in pet-proof medicine cabinets. Household chemicals should similarly be kept in cabinets or closets that pets cannot get into. Chemicals from the garage and outdoors such as antifreeze and fertilizer must not be accessible to pets; a teaspoon of antifreeze can be fatal to a cat, a tablespoon can poison a larger dog.

Finally, be aware of the medications and chemicals that you have in your house so that if your pet does start to show unusual signs, you can tell your veterinarian. Knowing what your pet may have ingested can significantly aid in treatment.

### Trash ingestion

Given the opportunity, dogs will get into nearly everything, and some are worse than others. Keep trash in bins or cans that cannot be easily tipped, or better yet keep them behind a cabinet door. Trash ingestion can lead to gastrointestinal obstruction (requiring surgery), pancreatitis (a severe, sometimes life-threatening condition), or gastroenteritis (vomiting and diarrhea leading to dehydration and requiring hospitalization).

Leads are available for every possible circumstance: short leads are available for suburban walks, longer ones are available for hikes in the woods. Attach a leash when taking dogs from the car to the house. These may seem like excessive measures, but our hope is that you and your pets will never know the trauma associated with motor vehicle accidents. Believe us, a leash is cheaper.

Depending upon the severity of the injuries, pets who have been hit by a car may require intensive monitoring and treatment. Medical bills in these cases can quickly reach \$5,000 - \$6,000 and up.

A good combination of leashes, fences and careful monitoring can save your family from the stress and agony associated with such a traumatic, yet sometimes avoidable, event.

# Pocket Pet Pen

Rabbits, guinea pigs, chinchillas and other small pets are susceptible to overheating. Overweight pets are at an even greater risk. Heatstroke most commonly occurs when the temperature is at or above 82°F. Humidity above 70% also increases the likelihood of heatstroke. A simple rule of thumb for predicting the possibility of heatstroke is to add the value of the temperature (°F) to the humidity. If the sum is greater than 150, the situation is dangerous.

For example, 80(°F) + 70(%) humidity = 150 (Dangerous).

Alternatively, use common sense, and when in doubt, err on the side of lowering ambient temperature and relative humidity.

## Signs of heatstroke include:

- Panting
- Depression
- Shakiness or staggering
- Disorientation
- Bright red tongue
- Thick, sticky saliva
- Convulsions

## What to do if you think your pet may be suffering from heatstroke:

Remove your pet from the hot area immediately and call your veterinarian. Putting water on your pet can help cool him or her while you are on your way to the vet, but do this slowly. Cooling too quickly, or allowing his or her temperature to drop too fast or too low, can lead to other life-threatening problems. Wet his or her ears and feet with cool water and then place him or her on a wet towel. Turn on the air conditioning in the car, or lower the windows, while you drive to your veterinarian.

Your veterinarian will lower your pet's body temperature to a safe range (if you have not done so already) and continue to monitor his or her temperature. Depending upon the severity of the case, your pet may be given fluids and possibly oxygen. He or she will then need to be monitored for shock, respiratory distress, kidney failure, heart abnormalities and other complications.



# Exotic Pet Safety Tips

## Heatstroke Prevention:

- Provide adequate shade and proper ventilation
- Do not put cages directly in front of a window.
- Provide covered houses for your pet to hide in.
- Do not use glass aquariums as they do not allow for proper ventilation.
- Pay attention as the sun moves across the sky to ensure your caged pet has access to shade at all times of the day.
- Encourage drinking by keeping water fresh.
- On extremely hot days, add ice cubes to the water.
- Make sure your pet cannot easily spill their water.
- If your pet has thick fur, groom him or her often to remove excess fur.
- Mist your pet's ears with water. Since most small mammals dissipate heat through their ears, misting them will help keep them cool.
- Keep your pet's cage clean. Urine will raise the humidity.
- Your small mammal does not need to "get some sun" on a hot day. Many of these species come from cool mountainous regions and are not well adapted to the heat.
- Chinchillas are especially sensitive to the humidity and may require more frequent dust baths as the humidity rises.

Many of the precautions mentioned here for our small pets are common sense, however while our free roaming dogs and cats can seek out shady, or breezy spots in the house, caged exotic pets cannot. For this reason, it is up to you to keep them cool and safe in the summertime.

It is also important to remember that many pets do not have cooling systems as efficient as ours. Temperatures which may be comfortable to humans, may not be as comfortable to a smaller mammal that cannot sweat. Stay vigilant, ensure your pet has access to shade and cooler temperatures, and heat stroke should never become a problem.

Below are some tips for keeping your exotic pet safe in a number of everyday situations. Please do not hesitate to ask your veterinarian if you have concerns for your particular pet and his or her safety.

- Do not leave young children unsupervised with small exotic pets. Mishandled pets will try to bite if they are uncomfortable. They will also squirm and may get dropped, leading to escape, possible broken bones, internal injuries and tears (on the part of the child).
- If a young child would like to hold your small pet and you don't mind, ask them to sit cross-legged on the ground (in a pet-proofed room), place the pet in their lap and let them stroke the pet under your supervision.
- Rabbits are especially prone to handling mishaps. They tend to wiggle and squirm and, if not properly held, there is every chance the animal may break its back. Ask your veterinarian about appropriate techniques for holding and restraining rabbits, this will ensure everyone is safe & happy.
- Indoor rabbits, with free roam of the house will happily chew through power cords, often with fatal results. Ensure all power cords are out of your rabbit's reach.
- Another danger for indoor rabbits is houseplants. Many of the plants with which we beautify our homes are fatally toxic to rabbits. Ensure all houseplants and kitchen garden herbs, however harmless looking, are kept out of rabbit reach.
- Ask any hamster or gerbil owner about their biggest fear & the answer is invariably: "My pet escaping." 

These furry, wriggly little rodents can be master escape artists and the average household presents a minefield of hazards and a host of hiding places.

Even the plastic "hamster balls" designed to give them exercise without free run of the house are not fool-proof and many an owner has turned around to find the hamster ball neatly split open, with their hamster or gerbil nowhere to be seen.

Be sure to check your pet's accommodations and make sure all clasps and door mechanisms are secure.
- Tailor your pet's exercise wheel to your pet. One size does not fit all.
- Use a wheel that has a solid surface and rear wall so that tiny feet and legs do not get caught or broken.
- Be sure that the wheel is the right size for your pet. Too large and your pet can't spin it, too small and your pet won't enjoy it as his back is arched and he can't stretch his legs to run. Keep the wheel clean to prevent spread of germs and infection.
- Avoid using pine or cedar shavings in any animal enclosure as the fumes from these shavings have been proven to cause respiratory problems in small animals. Better choices are aspen shavings or a recycled paper product such as Care Fresh bedding.
- Ferrets have flexible skeletal systems that allow them to squeeze into very small openings. Duct tape can be a good (but temporary) patch until more permanent methods can be used to block openings.
- Check for quarter-sized or larger holes in furniture, behind or under appliances, window screens and frames, in walls, around plumbing fixtures or drain pipes, floor vents, dryer vents, mail slots, fireplace grates/dampers/screens, dog/cat doors and under cabinets. If you don't find that escape route, your ferret will.
- Ferret-proof couches, upholstered furniture and mattresses by tacking hardboard, masonite, or heavy duty sheeting materials to their undersides. Ferrets like to climb inside, scratch up stuffing, and take naps.
- Recliners are a leading cause of accidental death in ferrets. It is best not to have them in a home with ferrets. Ferrets love to crawl into their mechanisms and, once opened or closed by a human, the ferret may be crushed. Recliners should always be kept in an upright position when ferrets are running loose.
- Keep stereo speakers out of reach or they too will turn into cozy hiding places for ferrets.
- Do not rock in a rocking chair while ferrets are at play.