

When Kitty Says No: Winning the Collar Battle

Tackling the feline resistance to collars with expert insights and surprising study findings. Learn strategies and tips to gently persuade even the most stubborn of cats, ensuring their safety with a touch of persistence and care.

Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Even if your cat, including your indoor-only cat, is microchipped, she still needs a collar with ID to give her the best chance of being returned to you in the event she's lost
- If you're concerned your feline family member won't wear a collar, a 2010 study showed that almost 75% of cats wore their collars for a minimum of six months; over half the cat owners said their kitties tolerated the collars better than expected
- Even indoor-only cats sometimes get outside, including very old and very timid kitties, which is why it's important they wear a collar and ID as well
- It's important to give your cat time to get used to wearing a collar, so consider picking a weekend or another two to three day stretch you can dedicate to your cat collar project

Collars serve the very important function of identifying animal companions in the event they go missing, and yes, cat people, this includes indoor-only feline family members!

These days, many pet parents mistakenly believe that microchipped cats don't need collars, but veterinarian Dr. Carly Fox at Schwarzman Animal Medical Center in New York City disagrees.

*"A **microchip** is not accessible to the average person and needs to be read at a veterinarian's office or shelter by a special machine," she writes in a response to Inverse.¹*

The good Samaritan who finds your lost cat can't read her microchip, but he or she can very easily read the information on kitty's collar and/or ID tag. According to Fox, animals out and about alone and not wearing a collar are less likely to be approached by a concerned human. "Animals who wear collars are typically perceived as being owned," she writes.

And this perception is important, because not only are collared pets likely to belong to someone, but strangers are more likely to approach them, assuming they're friendlier and healthier than strays.

Fox says that if your cat roams free outdoors (which **I do not recommend**), he "absolutely" should wear an identifying collar. "Your indoor cat should ideally wear a collar as well," she adds, in case he slips out.

'My Cat Refuses to Wear a Collar'

A 2010 study published in the Journal of American Veterinary Medical Association demonstrated that almost three out of four cats will tolerate collars.²

"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," veterinarian and lead study author Dr. Linda Lord told dvm360. "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."³

The study revealed that in one community, 40% of **lost cats** were indoor-only. Also, free-roaming cats without collars were likely to be fed by strangers, reducing the likelihood they would return home, or on the flip side, were ignored as strays.

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

If you assume your own little feline will have nothing to do with wearing a collar you might find some of the results from Lord's study interesting:

- Almost 75% of the cats in the study wore their collars for the entire six-months
- Of the cats that didn't wear collars for the full six months, the top two reasons given by owners were that the cats lost the collars, or they scratched excessively at them
- Over half the cat owners said their kitties tolerated the collars better than expected
- A full 90% of cat owners said they planned to keep the collars on their cats after the study was completed

Indoor Cats DO Get Outdoors

Even if your kitty lives entirely indoors, there's always a chance he might wind up outside somehow. All cats are curious, and since yours has explored every inch of your home, a door to the outside standing open will pique his interest right away.

Most indoor kitties, if they get outside, will bolt at the first unfamiliar sound. Too often, they run away from the open door or window instead of back through it. Or the door has been inadvertently closed behind them, and they can't get back in.

I have personally experienced the anguish of losing a cat this way. My first cat, Jerry, was a rescue. His curiosity about going outside escalated the entire second year he was in my home.

One night I came in my front door with both arms full of groceries. Before the screen door automatically closed behind me, Jerry ran out. I was so panicked I dropped the groceries on the counter and ran out after him. He became so frightened he darted through the neighbor's yard and disappeared into the night.

A group of us spent the whole night searching for him, posted REWARD IF FOUND signs all over town the next day and visited every area animal control weekly for three months. I never saw Jerry again.

Another common way cats wind up outdoors is when the first hint of spring arrives, homeowners fling open their windows and kitties jump up on the sill to investigate the outside world.

Window screens take a beating all year long, especially during winter weather. Many kitties have been known to escape or fall through a hole in a screen or a screen that has come loose from the window frame.

I've also seen situations where a housecat, often male, will actually push out a screen in the middle of a warm summer night to mix it up with the neighborhood tomcat.

Any sort **travel with your cat**, including vet visits, is another opportunity for him to slip away from you.

It's not smart to assume your cat won't ever get outside your house. Even very old and very timid kitties have found their way outdoors and disappeared, never to be seen again by their devastated families.

Getting Your Cat Used to Wearing a Collar

No matter what type of collar you choose for your cat, a proper fit is crucial. You should be able to fit two fingers between your kitty's neck and the collar. Keep a careful watch on your cat the first few days she wears her new collar. I recommend you pick a weekend or another two to three day stretch you can pretty much dedicate to your cat collar project.

Make sure her ID tag or information is on the collar. You may decide to introduce the collar first, and after your cat gets accustomed to the "jewelry" then add the tags. But don't forget to add the tag. If you don't like the sound of tags, there are many online retailers that will custom sew your pet's information right onto the collar itself.

Put the collar on her on Friday night and keep a close eye on her over the weekend. You can expect her to be a bit freaked out and annoyed initially — that's normal. What you need to be concerned about is excessive scratching at the collar that doesn't subside after a while, or keeps recurring.

Other things to watch for are your cat getting a paw hung up between the collar and her neck, catching the collar on an object (including her mouth), or the collar falling off repeatedly.

Until you're comfortable she's adjusting well, you can remove the collar at bedtime if you choose so you don't have to worry something will happen while you're asleep. Put the collar back on as soon as you get up and continue to observe her. If you need to leave the house for any reason, again, you can remove the collar before you leave and put it back on when you return.

Continue this on-and-off routine until both you and your kitty are comfortable with her new collar.

What Type of Collar Should I Buy?

That's really up to you and your cat. Fox recommends staying away from chain link, metal, or pronged collars and instead, going with a soft, lightweight textile with give and padding. A harness can also be also a good option for some cats, providing there's a way to include identifying information on it, or attached to it. Types of cat collars include:

- Buckle collars, typically made of nylon, leather or fabric
- Reflective collars that can be seen in darkness
- Elastic collars that slip on and off
- Breakaway safety collars designed to allow kitty to get out of the collar if it gets caught or hung up on anything

If you're not sure what type of collar is right for your pet or want to try a few different ones, shop at retailers with a liberal return policy. Whatever collar you decide on, don't forget the all-important ID information that will help bring your favorite feline back home if she's ever separated from you.

Sources and References

¹ [Inverse, December 2, 2023](#)

⁴ [Lord, L.K. et al. Cover Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association, Volume 237: Issue 4, 15 Aug 2010](#)

³ [dvm360, September 10, 2010](#)
