

Why Putting an AirTag on Your Dog's Collar Is a Terrible Idea

Apple's AirTag technology seems like an efficient way to track your pet, but it actually comes with dire consequences for your pet's health.

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Apple's AirTag, introduced in 2021, is designed to track personal items but is sometimes used for pets despite Apple's advice against it. This practice can be costly and possibly dangerous
- AirTags use Bluetooth to connect with Apple's Find My network, but their effectiveness decreases outside home networks and depends on nearby updated Apple devices to function properly
- While there have been successful cases of AirTags helping locate lost pets, the risks outweigh the benefits, as some pets have accidentally ingested the devices, leading to health emergencies
- Ingesting an AirTag can be particularly dangerous due to its battery, which may leak and cause organ damage if chewed or left in a pet's stomach for an extended period
- Alternative pet identification methods include ID tags, microchipping, GPS tracking and radio frequency identification devices. Preventative measures like proper leashing and securing doors are also recommended

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In 2021, Apple introduced the AirTag, a small and sophisticated-looking accessory designed to help people keep track of and locate their valuables, with the help of the Find My app.¹ But while it's mostly made to keep track of personal items like bags, wallet or keys, some pet owners are now using it on their pets — even though Apple recommends against it.^{2,3}

And despite the availability of pet-specific AirTag products, like AirTag case for collars that cost from hundreds to thousands of dollars,⁴ it's not a smart idea to use this device at all. Doing so can end up becoming a costly mistake and could even warrant an emergency trip to the vet.

Pet-Tracking with AirTags Has Its Limitations

An AirTag uses Bluetooth technology and works by emitting a signal that connects privately and securely to any device in Apple's location-tracking feature, which is Find My network. The AirTag's location is then triangulated by its connections, then reported back to your iPhone.

For pet parents, the feature they find most useful is the "Lost Mode." According to an article in Rover:⁵

“If you select ‘Mark as Lost’ from the Find My app, you’ll receive a notification any time your AirTag enters the Bluetooth range of any iPhone with cell service — any iPhone in the world. You’ll be sent the address where your AirTag was spotted, and you can even alter your settings so that the phone that came into contact with your AirTag receives a message with instructions from you.”

However, there are some drawbacks to this technology. First, it works best when used within your home network. If your pet escapes or runs away, the effectiveness of the AirTag decreases.

Another disadvantage is it’s dependent on other devices. If your pet gets lost and is found by other people, they need to have an updated iPhone or iPad with service to detect the AirTag and ping the Find My network.

“If you live in an unpopulated area or an area with spotty network coverage and activate ‘Lost Mode,’ the chances are good that no one with cell service is going to pass your pup — which means you won’t get any notifications or updates about their location.”

Some Dogs Have Accidentally Ingested the Device

There are some cases of AirTags having helped return lost pets. In 2022, a small-breed dog called Rocky accidentally escaped from his home in Florida. He was tracked by his owner using an AirTag connected to his collar.⁶ And in 2023, rescuers saved Seamus, an 18-month-old Australian Shepherd dog, when he was swept by floods in San Bernardino, California, by tracking the AirTag he was wearing.⁷

However, the risks outweigh the benefits, as there are some instances when pets chewed on the device and accidentally swallowed it. In an article published by The Wall Street Journal,⁸ pet parent Colin Mortimer lost an AirTag that was attached to the collar of his dog Sophie. After searching all over their home, he triggered the AirTag sound alert — it was coming from inside Sassy, his foster dog. Luckily, Sassy threw up the tracker.

Other pet parents aren’t as fortunate. An article in Apple Insider⁹ shares some tales of how dogs have accidentally ingested the device. One dog, called Rose, ended up chewing the device and ingesting pieces of metal and plastic when her owners were out of the house. Fortunately, she didn’t ingest the battery.

Puppies are particularly high risk due to their playfulness and penchant for chewing. Luna, a 6-month-old pup, was taken to the vet after she ingested the AirTag. However, the vet was unable to get Luna to vomit it out, and had to resort to surgery, which was still unsuccessful; Luna was then sent home. Six weeks later, she threw up the device on her own.

“It’s not just Apple who warns against using AirTags to track your dog, either. Vets have warned pet owners against using AirTags to keep tabs on their pets,” the article says.

“Because AirTags contain batteries, there’s a significant risk that they could leak and cause organ damage. The dangers of battery leaks increase if the battery has been damaged by chewing or if it sits in the dog’s stomach for a long time.”¹⁰

Other More Efficient Ways to Keep Track of Your Pet

The good news is that there are a variety of ways to help identify dogs and cats apart from AirTags. The simplest one is to use a basic ID tag with your pet's name and your contact information (name, phone number, email address and home address).

Another popular method for identifying dogs (and also cats) is microchipping. A tiny microchip, about the size of a grain of rice, is injected under your pet's skin, in the neck area between the shoulders. If a pet is lost and brought to a vet office, animal shelter or clinic, they will use a scanner that can read the code on it, which has your information, allowing you to reunite with your animal companion.

Other pet ID methods include GPS tracking, radio frequency identification devices, and tattoos. In addition, it is wise to practice preventative measures to prevent your dog from escaping in the first place. As the Apple Insider article says,¹¹ “Always keep your dog on a leash when not in fenced areas, and ensure everyone in your home knows to leave doors closed tightly when coming in and out of the house.”

Sources and References

¹ [Apple, April 20, 2021](#)

^{2,9,10,11} [Apple Insider, January 31, 2023](#)

³ [iMore, June 30, 2023](#)

⁴ [Case Mate, Do AirTags Work on Pets? Helpful Tips and More](#)

⁵ [Rover.com, Apple AirTag for Dogs: Is It a Good GPS Tracker Alternative?](#)

⁶ [Apple Insider, November 8, 2022](#)

⁷ [Apple Insider, January 20, 2023](#)

⁸ [The Wall Street Journal, January 30, 2023](#)
