

# Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors

Promoting the Best in Pet Behaviour



## Behaviourally aware microchipping

All puppies in the UK must now be microchipped by 8 weeks of age. This means chips will be placed during the puppy's most sensitive period of development. Their experiences during implantation will therefore have a strong influence over their expectations in any future situation they associated with the process. We know that stress as a puppy can impact on the dog's ability to cope with new and stressful situations as an adult and poor early experiences can lead to serious behaviour problems in later life. It is therefore essential that we make every puppy's microchip implantation experience as positive as possible.

### *Do puppies feel afraid under 8 weeks of age?*

It is commonly thought that puppies aren't afraid of anything new before they are 2-3 months of age. Puppies are more open to new experiences under 8 weeks of age, but they can be equally affected by a fearful or traumatic experience as a good one. Puppies also go through a period of being particularly sensitive to new or potentially worrying experiences between 5 - 9 weeks of age (dependant on the breed and the individual). It is therefore best to assume they may find the experience worrying and to take steps to minimise this.



### *Can microchip implantation be painful?*

Another commonly held belief is that puppies have little or no sensation in the area around the implantation site, and that they aren't worried by being held or lifted by the loose skin around the scruff as this is how their dam would carry or correct them. There are typically fewer nerve endings in this area compared to the rest of the body. However, they are not entirely absent and so puppies and dogs do still feel pain in this area, especially from such a large needle. A puppy's relaxed response to their dam carrying them by the scruff is also lost very early in their development. Being handled around the scruff area after this can be seen as a threat, potentially leading them to become worried or defensive around strangers in the future.

### *How can I make microchip implantation as positive as possible?*

- Make sure the implanter is experienced and has already practiced on inanimate objects or anaesthetised animals before implanting a puppy.
- Start by allowing the puppy to explore and get used to their surroundings and the person who will be placing the microchip. This is especially important if they are taken somewhere different, such as the veterinary practice, or haven't met the person before.
- Be aware that being on a table is a new and potentially worrying experience in itself. Try either sitting on the floor with the puppy, or placing treats or a toy on the table for the puppy to find when he is lifted onto it.
- Handle the puppy gently: never lift by the scruff or correct the puppy if he or she wriggles or is uncooperative.

- Familiarise the puppy to being touched around the implantation site whilst being played with or offered treats before the microchip is due to be placed. Practice this further just before placing the chip.
- Give the puppy something that will keep him occupied as the chip is placed. Smearing something tasty and sticky onto a toy for him to lick is useful for this. Implant the chip quickly and calmly and then continue to gently play with and fuss the puppy without touching the implantation site. Continue to avoid handling in this area for 48 hours post implantation, both to avoid disturbing the chip and in case it is sore. It is especially important to remain calm and to play or fuss gently, avoiding the implantation site, if the puppy squealed or seemed distressed during or immediately after implantation.

#### *What if the puppy seems worried before or during the procedure?*

If the puppy seems very nervous at being handled, in new situations or immediately prior to implantation it may be best to postpone this by asking your vet to consider issuing a Certificate of Exemption. This then allows time to teach the puppy to feel more relaxed whilst being handled at the implantation site, to get used to the person who will be placing the chip and to feel relaxed at the location where the procedure will be performed. Alternatively, your vet may be happy to postpone implantation until the puppy needs to be sedated or anaesthetised e.g. for neutering. It would also be advisable to ask your vet to delay implantation using a Certificate of Exemption if there is equipment failure. Repeated injections will increase fear and affect future responses to handling or visiting the practice.

For further advice on how to prepare puppies for, and limit any adverse effects of, microchipping contact your APBC/ABTC/CCAB Clinical Animal Behaviourist.