



Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

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How to Use A Head Halter

A head halter is a special kind of collar with a strap that goes around your dog's nose and another strap that goes around his neck, just behind his ears. The leash fastens to the halter under his chin to a ring that's also attached to the nose strap. When your dog begins to pull, the design of the head halter causes the dog's nose to be turned back toward you, which makes it physically difficult for him to continue pulling. The head halter is completely humane, as it does not cause any pain, and works much better to prevent a dog from pulling than a choke chain or prong collar. Brand names for head halters include "Gentle Leader," "Promise Collar" and "Halti".

How should it fit?

The head halter must be properly fitted to be effective and comfortable for your dog. The neck strap should be as high up on your dog's neck as you can get it, just behind his ears. The strap should be just tight enough for you to fit one finger between it and your dog's neck. The nosepiece should be adjusted so that when your dog's mouth is closed, it can slide down as far as the beginning of the skin on his nose, but not so loose that it can slide off the end of his nose. The nosepiece will sit naturally, just below your dog's eyes. Make sure that the metal ring to which the leash attaches is underneath his chin.

Conditioning Your Dog to Accept a Head Halter

It is important to remember that most dogs are not used to having anything rubbing their snout area and can balk, rather violently at times, at having a head halter applied suddenly. Without being properly conditioned to accept the head halter, many dogs will rub their snouts on the ground or against people, paw at their face, sometimes even causing permanent scarring! *We do not recommend using a head halter until you have followed the proper procedure to get the dog used to wearing one.* This may take from two days to a couple weeks, so be patient and work slowly.

1. Holding the head halter in one hand and some high value treats in another, praise and treat your dog when she comes over to investigate the new object. Each time she touches her nose to the halter, praise and treat her. You may have to be patient, waiting for her to approach the halter of her own accord, before you reward her. Do not force her to touch it, but let her decide to approach.
2. When she is consistently touching the halter for a treat, hold the loop that goes over the muzzle open with your hand. When your dog touches the halter again, hold the treat on one side of the loop so that your dog will have to stick her muzzle through the loop in order to take the treat. If she won't stick her muzzle through the loop, perhaps you should re-evaluate the value of your treats. Cheese, boiled chicken, or boiled liver are often very palatable for dogs.
3. As you repeat this exercise, feeding your dog through the loop, she will start to anticipate having to place her snout through the loop to collect her treats. Soon she will begin offering this behavior voluntarily, which you must reward well.
4. Slowly increase the amount of time your dog has to leave her snout in the loop before you reward her. When she will stay in the loop for 30 seconds, clasp the neck strap behind her head. Treat her

immediately, then unclasp the strap. When the halter is completely on her, she should get treats. When the halter is off, no treats should be offered.

5. Very gradually increase the amount of time that your dog wears the head halter and receives treats, making sure that she shows no sign of discomfort. If she paws at her face even once, you are moving too quickly and you must go back a step or two.
6. When she can wear the halter for 30 seconds without signs of stress or resentment, put the halter on her just before she eats her meals, remembering to take it off as soon as she finishes eating. You can also put the head halter on just before going out on walks with your dog, if she likes to go out, but unclasp it after just a few minutes outside because she isn't yet used to wearing the halter for that long.
7. Soon your dog will look forward to wearing the head halter, as it has become the predictor of good things: treats, meals, and walks. You can slowly get her used to wearing it for longer and longer lengths of time, occasionally praising her and treating her for her efforts.

Things to remember:

- Make sure the head halter is fitted properly. It should be snug around your dog's neck and high behind his ears, but loose enough around his nose so that the nose strap can slide easily down to the fleshy part of his nose.
- A head halter is not a muzzle. A dog wearing a head halter can still eat, drink, pant, bark and bite if he chooses.
- Never use a hard jerk with the head halter; it can cause serious injury.
- Don't use the head halter with a retractable lead.
- If your dog runs quickly to the end of the lead, he may give himself a potentially harmful hard jerk.
- Your dog should wear his head halter only during on-leash walks with you and/or when you're directly supervising him.
- If your dog wears the head halter around the house, he will have plenty of time to work at getting it off, and will eventually succeed.
- Read the information sheet that comes with your head halter.