

# Head Halters in Dogs

Taking your dog for a walk is a great way to get exercise for your dog as well as yourself, and the benefits of the exercise and spending time with your dog are countless. Unfortunately most dogs usually do not come pre-trained on how to properly walk on a leash. Having a dog that is properly leash-trained will add enjoyment to the walk and prevent problems like tugging, pulling, sniffing at everything it passes, and marking. Many tools are available that help to teach your dog how to properly walk on a leash including: basic collar and leash; choke collars; pinch collars; and many varieties of harnesses and head halters. All of the above methods have their advantages and disadvantages, but the head halter is thought to be a great training tool because of how it works.

## What is a head collar?

There are a few major brands of head collars available that have minor differences between them. This clinic recommends the use of the Gentle Leader® head collar. The Gentle Leader® head collar is made with 2 nylon strap loops. One of the loops travels around the dog's muzzle and is made to remain loose. The second nylon loop goes around the dog's neck and back behind the ears and should fit very snugly. A ring is present where the leash attaches underneath the chin and pulling on this ring directs the head in the direction you want it to travel with very little force required.

## How does it work?

The Gentle Leader® gives you more control when walking your dog. Since dogs instinctually follow their noses, controlling their head is the best way to get them to move in the direction that you want them to. This is also beneficial in aggressive dogs where controlling the head is very important to prevent injury to yourself or others and may actually help to calm them. Also pulling on the leash will shut the dog's mouth not allowing it to easily bite or bark at another dog.

## How do I fit the head collar?

Fitting the head collar is easy once you have done it a couple of times. First you will attach the leash to the ring of the head collar. Fit the neck strap, making sure it is just below the bump on your dog's head in back, and above the Adam's apple in the front. The neck strap should fit snugly and you should only be able to get 1 finger underneath it comfortably. You can then fit the strap around the muzzle, making sure that it is loose enough to slip back and forth but not so loose that it will come off. Once placed the straps on the side should make a "V" shape to show that it is at the proper tightness versus an "L" shape if it is too loose. Very detailed instructions for sizing and putting on the head collar are provided at [www.premier.com](http://www.premier.com) with diagrams to better explain. If you have any questions please contact us and we can help you with the fitting process.

### **How do I do introduce it to my dog?**

There are many different methods of introducing the Gentle Leader® to your dog. We recommend introduction using a procedure of desensitization and counter-conditioning. With this method you will put the halter on a dog slowly while giving them treats. Start by letting the dog sniff and get used to the sight of the halter, then slowly progress to laying the halter on the dog's nose and head all the time while giving treats. Progress slowly towards putting the halter all the way on over multiple sessions making sure to watch the dog and make sure they feel comfortable. Eventually your dog will get used to the halter and act like it is not even on. At this point you can move to attaching the leash and starting to walk your dog. Remember to go slowly and make sure your dog is comfortable all the while reinforcing positive behavior with treats.

### **How do I walk my dog with the head collar?**

One of the great benefits is that the halter helps your dog to self correct rather than having to jerk the collar for a correction, like with traditional collars. The first time you walk with the collar make sure to keep your dog walking and then make him sit when stopped. If he tries to paw the collar off start walking forward again. Make sure not to comfort your animal or reward them when they are performing unwanted behavior but give them treats and reassurance when they are doing a good job. If your dog is not adjusting well to the collar make sure that it fits properly and that the nose strap is loosening when you let up on the leash. Your dog should be able to comfortably have his mouth open unless pressure is being applied to the leash. Also make sure to not jerk on the collar or hang the dog up by it. One of the great things about the Gentle Leader® is that a lot of force is not necessary to train your dog since the collar help to train them in an instinctive manner.

Gentle Leaders® are a great training tool for people who want a dog who walks well on a leash with no pulling or tugging. They are easy to fit and get started with and can be used to correct many negative behaviors in dogs. With the use of the Gentle Leader® you can be the one at the park with the dog walking calmly by your side. Please ask your veterinarian or veterinary staff if you have any further questions or consult the resources below for more information.

### **Further Information:**

Animal Behavior Resources Institute, [www.abrionline.org](http://www.abrionline.org)

*Handout created as part of a class exercise by veterinary students:  
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[www.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/vmth/small\\_animal/behavior](http://www.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/vmth/small_animal/behavior)