

Guide to Collars and Harnesses

Flat Collar

Flat collars, often made of nylon or other sturdy material, are the most commonly used type of collar for pet parents. Dogs that are well-mannered on leashes do great with flat collars, and they are convenient to use because of how easy they are to put on and take off. Collars should be loose enough to fit two fingers in between the collar and the dog to avoid safety risks such as the collar getting caught in the dog's mouth or an inadequate ability to breathe. This kind of collar is gentle on the dog's neck when used appropriately, but dogs that pull hard on leash may inadvertently choke themselves.



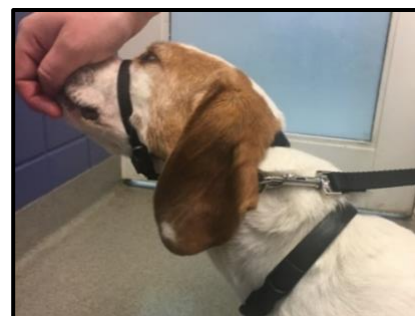
Martingale Collar

Martingale collars are the type of collars used by the Nebraska Humane Society. These collars look very similar to flat collars, but have a loop feature that will cause limited tightening if a dog pulls. The limited tightening helps prevent the ability for dogs to slip out of the collar and is often the best choice for dogs with slim heads (like Greyhounds or Whippets) that can easily slip out of flat collars. Martingale collars are difficult for the dogs to maneuver out of, but like a flat collar, dogs that pull hard on leash may accidentally hurt themselves.



Head Collar (Gentle Leader)

Head collars are similar to a horse's harness that fits around the dog's head. These collars are very effective in redirecting dogs that pull hard on their leash so that they are focusing back on their owners. While these collars will not hurt the dog if used correctly, they will make pulling on leash very uncomfortable. Some dogs will be very reluctant to wear a head collar and may need counter-conditioning (that is, pairing treats with putting the head collar on) to be successful in using them.



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Back Clip Harness

Back clip harnesses can be beneficial for certain breeds, specifically brachycephalic or snub nosed dogs. For brachycephalic dogs, we strongly encourage the use of a step in harness which ensures there is no pressure on the dog's neck since they already have difficulty breathing. The biggest downside to step in harnesses or any back clip harness is that they encourage pulling and, for dogs that pull hard on their leash, they can make it very difficult to control the dog.



Front Clip Harness (Easy Walk Harness)

Front clip harnesses are useful for dogs that pull in that they help to redirect the dog's attention back to their human. Like most other harnesses, these devices will remove the pressure on the neck that many collars will cause to dogs that pull on leash. While front clip harnesses relieve strain on the neck and back and help redirect the dog to their owner, dogs can still pull though they may not be as strong. Additionally, these harnesses can be easy for some dogs to get out of, so clipping the leash to both the harness and a martingale collar is recommended. Because these harnesses may loosen with wear, it is important to regularly check the fit and adjust as needed.



A Warning about Choke Chains, Prong Collars, and Shock Collars

Choke, prong, and shock collars can do irreversible physical and psychological damage to dogs, so they are not recommended by modern dog trainers and behaviorists. Choke chains and prong collars may cause soft tissue injuries and tracheal/esophageal damage. Additionally, when these types of equipment are used, dogs may build negative associations with their handler or other things in their environment. For instance, a dog pulls on the leash when it sees dogs, strangers, or children, so the dog is fitted with a prong collar. Now every time the dog sees dogs, strangers, or children on leash, it experiences pain from the prongs. Though the dog may temporarily stop pulling on the leash, they can tolerate increasing amounts of pain over time, so pulling will likely return. Further, the dog may begin to associate the sight of these 'triggers' with pain, which can result in aggressive behavior towards other dogs, strangers, or children over time. For these reasons, the use of front clip harnesses and head collars along with positive reinforcement training are recommended to correct pulling on leash over the use of choke chains, prong collars, and shock collars. Dogs learn best by communicating to them what behavior we do want and rewarding them for that behavior, rather than punishing them for the behavior we *don't* want.

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