

A Better Way to Walk Your Dog
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Taking your dog for a walk can be an enjoyable experience for both of you. But if your dog drags you down the street, choking and gagging himself on a choke chain or you have to repeatedly yell at him to stop pulling as you jerk his leash, the walk quickly becomes unpleasant. In most obedience classes, dogs are taught to heel using choke chains, also known as training collars or slip collars. A veterinarian friend of ours is fond of pointing out that the only domestic animal we attempt to train by choking is man's best friend. We suggest using a head collar instead.

Head collars are sometimes mistaken for a muzzle, which they are not. One type of head collar, The Gentle Leader™, was developed by Dr. R.K. Anderson and Ms. Ruth Foster. Dr. Anderson is a veterinarian and is certified veterinary behaviorist. Ms. Foster is a dog obedience trainer and AKC obedience judge.

The Gentle Leader™ is an effective and humane way to train a dog to walk on a loose leash without pulling by making use of a knowledge of dog behavior. It consists of a loop that fits over the dog's nose, below the eyes and behind the corners of the dog's mouth. Another loop is buckled high on the dog's neck, right behind the ears. The two loops join under the dog's chin, where the leash is attached. Other types of head collars, the Halti™, and the Snoot Loop™ are designed slightly differently.

Putting pressure over the bridge of the nose and the top of the neck mimics postures that dogs use with each other to establish dominance and control. The head collar encourages the dog not to pull without the use of physical force or discomfort. It is not uncommon for a dog to resist the sensation of having something on top of her muzzle.

The first time the head collar is on, the dog may rub her head on the ground or paw at the collar. The most dominant dogs often resist the most because they do not want to be controlled. The Gentle Leader™ is therefore particularly effective on large, physically strong dogs who are also strong-willed. The dog adapts to the collar much more quickly if it is first put on before engaging in an enjoyable activity such as going for a walk or playing fetch. Once the dog's attention is focused elsewhere, she quickly forgets about the collar.

We advocate the use of a head collar because it works - from both the dog's and the owner's perspective. It allows owners to gain control quickly so they can enjoy their dogs, and the dogs are not painfully jerked around on choke chains. It is difficult to misuse a Gentle Leader™ - it is relatively easy to misuse a choke chain. The Halti™ is available in black and can be purchased at pet stores. Gentle Leaders™ are available in a variety of colors and sizes and can also be purchased at larger pet stores, or from Premier Pet Products at 1-888-640-8840.

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