

Head Halters

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 under his chin to a ring that's 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 doesn't 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, Snoot Loop, 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.

How Will Your Dog React?

Most dogs will resist a head halter at first. The amount of resistance varies for each dog. When you first put the head halter on, your dog may try to get it off by pawing at his nose or rubbing his nose on the ground, on you, or on anything he can get close to. The best strategy is to distract your dog by throwing a trail of treats on the ground in front of him. You can also keep him moving by offering treats from your hand and praising him. It is important to ensure that the nosepiece is fitted properly, so that he never is successful in pawing it off. Most dogs eventually accept head halters. When your dog associates the halter with going for a walk, he'll begin to react positively to it, and soon, both you and your dog will enjoy taking walks together!

When working with your dog at home, have him wear the halter for very short time periods while distracting him from the halter and rewarding his patience with treats. Also, practice short walks in your own yard before going out for a longer walk on the head halter. One easy way to create a positive association a head halter is to feed your dog while wearing the halter. As soon as your dog is finished eating, take the halter off.

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 – the dog can still eat, drink, pant, bark, and bite, if he chooses.
- Never use a hard jerk with the head halter. This could injure your dog.
- Do not use the head halter with a retractable lead. It not only teaches your dog to pull, but if your dog runs quickly to the end of the lead, he may give himself a 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'll have plenty of time to work at getting it off, and will eventually succeed.
- Read the information sheet that comes with your dog's head halter. You can also ask the salesperson where you make your purchase if they can help you to properly fit the halter to your dog.