



PAWS[®] CHICAGO

TRAINING PROTOCOLS | Head Halters

Head Halters are designed to direct your dog's entire body by controlling the head and nose, making them a good choice for some dogs with problems walking on leash. A dog head halter loops over the dog's muzzle just below the eyes. You then attach your leash below the chin.

When your dog pulls on the leash, the head halter puts pressure on the top of the muzzle, pulling its chin down or to the side. This reduces the strength the dog has to pull and makes it easier for you to get your dog's attention when it is distracted.

It is important to remember that dog head halters are just a piece of equipment and will not teach your dog to stop pulling without training. Some dogs find the pressure on their nose uncomfortable enough to stop them from pulling and others will try to power through it. A head halter is a very useful tool for reactive dogs giving you some control over your dog's gaze.

There are different brands on the market, but the two most popular are the Gentle Leader and the Halti Optifit. Many dogs do not like the feeling of the head halter on their muzzles and it takes some time for them to get used to it. Make sure your dog's head halter is fit correctly and is not too tight. The equipment is adjustable and comes with fitting instructions; but make sure your dog has enough room to pant, take treats, drink water and even play ball.

As with all new equipment, don't rush your training. Use short sessions over several days making sure your dog is wearing it happily.

Introducing the Dog to the Halter

Step 1

Get yourself familiar with the head halter and prepare some of your dog's favorite treats. Show your dog the head halter and reward it for sniffing it.

Step 2

Hold the head halter open with your hands and put a treat in front of the nose opening. Make sure the opening is very large and allow your dog to take the treat when it puts its nose through the opening. Repeat this step several times until your dog is reliably putting its nose through the opening to get the treat.

Step 3

Clip the neck collar on your dog without having it put its nose through the loop. Reward your dog. Remember that the collar needs to fit up high and directly behind your dog's ears. This may fit more snugly than a regular collar and feel different to your dog; so keep the treats coming!

Step 4

Adjust the loop so it is smaller and repeat Step 2 until your dog is comfortable. While your dog's nose is through the loop, clip the collar and jackpot your dog with many treats for wearing the head halter. Remove immediately after your celebration.

Step 5

Repeat Step 4 during your next training session and then over several sessions, increase the time your dog wears the head halter. Take your time during this step and continue to reinforce your dog with its favorite treats.

Step 6

Always use a treat to condition your dog to put its nose through the loop and after clipping the collar. When your dog can happily wear the head halter for about 30 seconds, attach your leash to the ring under your dog's chin.

Step 7

Repeat Step 6 and after your leash is on, teach your dog to move forward walking next to you. If it seems uncomfortable, lure it with a treat; otherwise, praise and reward it periodically for staying close to your side. Practice indoors until your dog is extremely comfortable and then try walking outdoors in a quiet place without distractions. Keep your sessions short and increase the distraction level slowly.

Remember that a head halter is a training aide and does not replace obedience training; they should be used side by side. If your dog has some obedience training foundation, you can start to practice with the head halter on. The following tips can be helpful:

- Never use corrections or jerk on the head halter for any reason. This could be dangerous and injure your dog's neck. Instead use the collar to guide your dog.
- Do not keep the leash tight while your dog is walking. This will cause discomfort and it may stop enjoying the head halter. Immediately release pressure on the leash when your dog is walking beside you and reward it consistently for good walking behavior.
- Make sure the collar you choose has a safety strap that connects with your regular collar. Without this strap, your dog could get loose. A second leash connected to the dog's regular collar can be used as a backup if necessary.
- Used properly and trained patiently, head halters are a helpful training tool. Walking a dog in the city can be challenging and head halters are a great help for reactive, strong or exuberant dogs.