

A Quick Guide to collars, leads, harnesses and head halters

Key information:

It's possible to train a dog without using any equipment, but for safety dogs should be walked on lead and be kept under close control. Training takes time and patience, and an understanding of your dog's needs. Most training can be done with a simple flat collar and standard-length lead. If you're having issues with your dog, the desire for a 'quick fix' might mean you want to try something else. But some equipment is designed to be highly aversive, and can cause pain, discomfort, stress, anxiety, frustration and physical injury. Certain types of equipment are banned in some countries because of this. Please choose with care, and always have empathy for your dog. Consult a trainer or behaviourist if you need help with your dog.

Leads

- **Very short training lead.** Acts as a handle to grab during training.
- **Short lead.** Usually fabric or leather, but chain ones are useful for dogs who bite/ chew their lead. Keeps a dog close to you while walking. Various lengths depending on breed/ size. Some short leads have a bungee part, to stop the shock of your dog suddenly pulling – but they can make pulling worse by reducing the communication between you and your dog through the lead.
- **Longer training lead.** Allows a dog a bit more room to move away and sniff, or to interact with a person or dog, but not so far that a dog can pull away. Usually has a clip at both ends, so you can use it with a harness or head halter for two-point contact.
- **Puppy training line.** Lightweight fabric, these are useful around the home when you need to move a puppy away from something without having to touch them. Under supervision only.
- **Extendable.** Various lengths, either cord or tape, and allows a dog to move several meters away. Great for recall training, and when a dog cannot be let of lead in that location. Can be a problem if your dog gets overexcited or pulls too much.
- **Long line.** These are fabric, very long, and can trail on the ground, allowing a dog much more freedom. Great for recall training, especially around distractions. Gives you something to grab/ stand on if your dog tries to run away. Can cause issues if it gets tangled around legs (people and dogs); plus a risk of rope burn if you're not using gloves.
- **Slip leads and check/ choke chains.** These are either fabric or chain, and continue to tighten as a dog pulls. Some are very thin, and can cause a lot of pain. Can cause damage to windpipes/ neck – best to only use them once a dog has been trained not to pull, and then only wider fabric ones. Useful when a lead needs to be put on/ taken off quickly (e.g. during work or training).
- **Figure-eight.** These are like a normal slip lead, with a twist put in them, which then fits over a dog's muzzle, thereby creating a head halter.

Collars

- **Puppy collar.** Lightweight fabric. For young, unvaccinated puppies, who aren't yet walking out, but need to get used to a collar and lead. Useful when needing to move them away from trouble!
- **Flat collar.** Fabric or leather, with a buckle or clip fastening. Padded ones are even more comfortable. Needs to be broad enough for the size and breed of dog wearing it, and should be very wide for sight hounds (who generally have a more sensitive neck). Great for all training and general management. A dog's ID tag can be easily attached to it, as can some smart tech e.g. tracker/ activity monitor.
- **Martingale/ half-check.** Fabric, or fabric and chain. They only tighten to a set point (and need to be carefully sized and fitted, to not cause pain or discomfort). Great for dogs that try to pull backwards out of their collar.
- **Pinch/ prong collars.** Banned in many countries (inc. Australia) because of the pain, stress and damage they can cause. Metal spikes dig into a dog's neck when the lead is pulled. Promoted by some trainers as a cure for pulling and 'disobedience' when walking, but can cause more problems than they fix.
- **Vibrating collars.** Great for training deaf dogs, they allow communication with a dog at a distance. Careful training is needed for a dog to understand what is required – it's not about scaring them, it's acting as a cue e.g. 'come'.
- **Spray collars.** These are remote collars that spray a jet of liquid (neutral or citronella) into a dog's face when a button is pressed. There is an audible signal that is used first, as a warning. Used for recall issues or to stop aggressive behaviour when away from their owner. These rely on punishment, and can cause more problems than they fix.
- **Anti-bark collars.** Promoted as a way to solve problem barking, dogs receive an unpleasant sound/ spray/ shock when they bark. It doesn't change the underlying issues, and it relies on aversive punishment which can cause more problems than they fix.
- **Electric shock collars.** Banned in some countries (including England), they are remote collars that allow the handler to deliver an electric shock to a dog's neck. There is an audible signal that is used first, as a warning. Used by some trainers for recall issues, predatory behaviour towards livestock, or to stop aggressive behaviour to people and dogs when at a distance from their handler. These rely on a high level of aversive punishment, and can cause more problems than they solve.
- **Electric shock collars for invisible fencing.** These work on an automatic setting. When a dog gets close to the invisible fence (a wire buried in the ground) the collar emits a sound. If the dog continues to move forward, they receive an electric shock. These rely on a high level of aversive punishment, and can cause more problems than they fix.

Body Harnesses

- **Comfort.** This is designed for a dog to feel comfortable on a walk, with no rubbing or pressure on any part of their body. They either clip up over a dog's back, or their head goes through one bit, with clips at the side (or a variation of these). Different dogs do better with different designs – try them out first.
- **Two-point contact.** To help with pulling, there are rings on the back and chest area, which allows a dog to be moved to the side more easily.
- **Anti-pull – front/ shoulder restriction.** These harnesses block forward motion by restricting power from the shoulders and chest muscles – lead is usually clipped to a ring on the dog's side.
- **Anti-pull – constricting.** These harnesses keep tightening as a dog pulls. As they start to feel discomfort, the theory is that they'll back off the pressure and stop pulling so much. But they can also cause pain and injury in some dogs.
- **Safety.** These are for travelling in the car, and can clip into seatbelts.

Head halters/ head collars

- **Over the nose, D-ring underneath.** Can either be fixed into one position (e.g. Gentle Leader), or there may be some movement in it to allow a dog to open their mouth wider if not pulling (e.g. Halti, Dogmatic). Can cause discomfort or injury if dogs are not trained to walk without pulling. Best with a double ended lead to use two-point contact (collar plus head collar).
- **Over the nose, D-ring on the back of the neck.** Keeps a dog's head lower than other head collars, but harder to turn them to the side (e.g. Canny Collar).
- **Muzzle with D-ring.** A useful combination when needing the extra safety of a muzzle, with the ability to turn a dog away from potential trouble.