

Homeward Bound Golden Retriever Rescue

Golden Rule Training

The Dangers of Choke Chains and Pinch Collars

Choke chains and pinch collars are unnecessary to teach your dog to walk on a leash or to control your dog. There are better alternatives to these collars that allow control without harming your dog. Both of these collars are **not** recommended by Homeward Bound.

Whether you or your dog is pulling while on a choke chain, the result is the same, your dog can be seriously injured! Some of the risks include injured blood vessels, tracheal damage, neck sprains, fainting due to no air passage, and laryngeal nerve paralysis.

Some of the common myths are:

Myth: "A choke chain is fine, in the hands of an experienced handler"

Truth: Wrong! Choke chains always choke!

Myth: "Choke chains prevent dogs pulling"

Truth: Nothing could be further from the truth. Dogs pull on choke chains because they haven't been trained not to pull!

Myth: "The dog learns not to pull because he hears the warning "chink" of the chain before it is jerked."

Truth: It is simple; dogs learn how to avoid pain so they stop.

Do we really want to train dogs using pain and fear, not to mention the high probability of injury? A fearful dog is unreliable and training through fear and pain does nothing to help the dog and the handler bond.

In addition, rescued dogs may have been abused in the past, so using an abusive training method is not beneficial. Positive reinforcement with the right equipment is all that is needed for any dog to learn to walk on a leash without pulling.

Homeward Bound only uses head collars, martingale collars and reward-based training methods when teaching leash skills. We use Gentle Leaders and Halti's, and the results have been dramatic; both our dogs in the

sanctuary and in our train classes are making progress quickly and without injury.

Given that these kinder and more effective alternatives exist, the role of the painful choke, pinch and shock collars are cruel and inhumane. In reality their use is unnecessary and often ineffective.

Alternatives to Choke Chains and Pinch Collars

Martingale collars, Gentle Leaders and Halti's:

Martingale collars

A Martingale is placed on all of our dogs when they come to Homeward Bound and leave with one when they find their forever home. We use these collars because they are the safest and most humane than any other collar. The benefits are:

- The loop design of the dog collar prevents it from slipping off the dog's head.
- The collar is much safer, preventing the dog from escaping and endangering himself.
- The collar is dog friendly and more humane. When the collar is connected to a leash, it closes around the actual diameter of the dog's neck. In this way, the closing of the collar does not restrict the dog's throat like a traditional choke chain, or pinch collar.
- The Martingale collar is perfect for any Golden Retriever and many sporting and working breeds like: Vizlas, Borzoi, Collies, Australian Shepherds, Greyhounds, Whippets, Boxers, and Pharaoh hounds, to name a few.
- Most dogs respond to the Martingale better than with a choke collar. It never produces a choke hold on the dog, but gently tightens to fit the dog's neck. There is no pain or constriction of any kind to the dog if fitted properly.
- The collar remains in position on the dog's neck much better than a traditional flat collar. Because of this position, most dogs will not pull and tug in front of the owner. It is a much better collar for loose leash walking and training.
- A struggling dog cannot back out of this collar. If the dog is frightened by traffic or loud noises, trying to rear away from the frightening source, he cannot pull out of the Martingale.

All of these facts are a good reason to try the Martingale collar with your dog. The collar is very effective when fitted according to manufacturer's specifications. The basic fitting method is to tighten correctly. When the smaller loop is pulled, the two outer parts of the collar should join in the middle, fitting comfortably on the dog's neck.

The Martingale collars are available in a variety of sizes, colors, patterns, and materials. They are sometimes hard to find, so we sell them at Homeward Bound. You can also find them in pet stores and on-line. Most sites will tell you how to measure your dog's neck and each Martingale is adjustable to fit a variety of sizes.

Halti and Gentle Leader Collars:

There are several brands of these head collars including the Halti and Gentle Leader collars. These collars look more like a horse's halter, with a band going around the back of the head, and another around the nose. The leash snaps onto the collar under the chin. When you pull on the leash, the dog's head will either be pulled down or to the side – this makes it virtually impossible for the dog to move ahead or pull you forward.

These types of collars actually give you better control than 'choke' collars or prong collars.

The Gentle Leader is excellent for leash training Golden Retrievers, Labs and other dogs. The harness has a ring in the front of the neck section of the harness which, again, makes walking and leash training your dog a so much easier. The Gentle Leader completely solves this problem and helps the dog learn to walk and heel without struggle.

Make sure you purchase the right size for your dog. Gentle Leader products come with user guides and instructional CDs. You will be surprised how Gentle Leader products have taken the strain and struggle out of walking and leash training your dog.

In the beginning most dogs struggle with the head collars, but they do get used to them. The only two reasons a head collar does not work is if it is not fitted correctly and if the pet parent gives up too quickly.

Tip: When at home, put the Gentle Leader or Halti on for a minute, give the dog a treat and take it off. This will help your dog understand that the head collar does come off. Next, take a short walk with your dog (maybe around the block), come home take it off and give him a treat. The next walk is longer until he has adjusted to the head collar.

A Halti resembles a horse collar. It is also sometimes mistaken for a muzzle. Just as the Gentle Leader, the intent of a Halti is to control the direction of your dog's head. The premise is if you control the head, you control the body. As result, the Halti leads the dog and controls its behavior in a gentle manner.

Both collars work very well, depending on the need, level of activity and shape of the dogs head determined which collar to use. We sell both of these at Homeward Bound for your convenience.

Some people may be hesitant to use the collar, since they feel it looks more like a muzzle than a collar. You may have people ask you about the collar, but more often than not, when you are through explaining it, they will ask you where they can get one for their dog!

The Break-Away collar is another option if you have more than one dog in the household. When dogs play they can get their teeth or paws caught in the collar and there have been cases of strangulation. The Break-Away collar releases so there is no risk of injury. These collars are used at home and not recommended for walking and training activities.

FAQ:

How long does it take for them to get used to the collar?

Some dogs respond immediately and some try to get the head collar off by moving their head from side to side. The trick is to make sure it is fitted correctly and patience. Take your dog for short walks and reward them when you come home; then increase the time with each walk.

Once he walks well on the head collar, can I wean him off?

Yes. Once he has learned to walk without pulling, you can start teaching him to heel. HB has an intermediate class that teaches "heel."

Are head collars self-correcting? When the dog pulls on the leash, the dog's head is immediately pulled downward. Do not yank or "pop" the leash to correct your dog. The structure of the head collar responds immediately to correct the dog and helps the dog learn more quickly.

How long does it take after your dog pulls on his leash before you correct him?

Head collars correct immediately. Your dog may struggle at first; ignore him and keep walking and eventually he will get used to the collar.

How many times does your dog pull and you do not correct him?

Head collars correct the dog every time the dog pulls. Again, do not "pop" the leash or jerk the leash, it is self-correcting.

Does it really work? Head collars offer you peace of mind and more peaceful walks. You have better control of your dog so you can relax and enjoy taking him for a walk.

What can you do to keep your dog safe?

1. NEVER use a choke chain or pinch collar
2. Always use a safe collar, such as a Martingale
3. Only use a head collar when out for a walk, do not leave it on your dog.
4. Share the knowledge with other pet owners!

Studies and additional information

The San Francisco Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals says the following:

"Choke and shock collars are designed to stop dogs from pulling on a leash for barking, through the application of pain. The dog stops pulling - because it hurts. Halters and reward-based training, on the other hand, can achieve more effective results without hurting dogs".

"In a retrospective study on spinal pain, injury or changes in dogs conducted in Sweden, Hallgreen (1992) found that 91% of dogs with cervical anomalies experienced harsh jerks on lead or had a long history of pulling on the lead. A use of chokers was also overrepresented in this group. This strongly suggests that such corrections are potentially injurious." - Karen Overall, Clinical Behavioral Medicine for Small Animals.

"In 30 years of practice (including 22 as a veterinary advisor to a police dog section) I have seen numerous severely sprained necks, cases of fainting, transient foreleg paresis and hind leg ataxia after robust use of the "check" chain. When the practice of slamming the dog sideways with a jerk that brought the foreparts clear of the ground and two or three feet towards the handler, became popular in the 1970's the resulting painful condition was known as "Woodhouse neck" in this practice. Some of these cases exhibited misalignment of cervical vertebrae on radiographs. My ophthalmology colleagues have decided views on the relation between

compression of the neck, intraocular pressure disturbances and damage to the cervical sympathetic nerve chain resulting in Horner's syndrome. I personally have seen a case of swollen eyes with petechial sclera hemorrhage and a number of temporarily voiceless dogs"

-By Robin Walker, Vet Record.

"Some old school, force-based trainers insist that you have to overpower the dog with force, using things like scruff shakes (where the handler grabs the sides of the dog's neck and shakes him), and alpha rolls (where the handler flips the dog onto his back and holds him there until he stops resisting) or, if necessary, by hanging the dog with a choke collar until he submits or collapses in unconsciousness. Most owners, thankfully, are unwilling or unable to inflict this kind of abuse on their dogs. These abused dogs frequently end up biting or becoming enough of a threat that they are surrendered to animal shelters, where they are usually euthanized as dangerous and incorrigible. Sadly, if these dogs had been trained with non-confrontational methods, they might have been fine."

-Pat Miller, The Power of Positive Dog Training

Sources:

Animalsinmind.com

Pat Miller - The Power of Positive Dog Training."