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How to Use a Head Halter

“WHOA, ROVER, WHOA!” Sound familiar? If that’s what it’s like when you take your dog for a walk, you may want to consider getting a head halter.

A head halter is a special kind of collar designed for dogs who like to pull their people when they walk. It consists of a strap that goes around your dog’s nose and another strap that goes around his neck, just behind his ears. The leash fastens to the halter under the dog’s chin to a ring that’s also attached to the nose strap. When your dog begins to pull, the design of the head halter causes his nose to be turned down and back toward you, which makes it physically difficult for him to continue pulling.

The head halter is a humane method of restraint because it doesn’t cause any pain. It works much better to stop a dog from pulling than a choke chain or prong collar. Some brand names of head halters include “Gentle Leader,” “Promise Collar,” and “Halti.”

How Should It Fit?

The head halter must be fitted properly 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, the nosepiece can slide down to where the skin begins 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 keep his head up and keep him moving by using positive verbal reinforcement and treats. 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!

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Things to Remember

- Make sure the head halter is fitted properly.
- Fit the halter so that it is 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.
- Don't confuse the head halter with a muzzle.
- Keep in mind that a dog wearing a head halter can still eat, drink, pant, bark, and bite, if he chooses.
- Never use a hard jerk with the head halter.
- Never use the head halter with a retractable lead.
- Be sure your dog doesn't run quickly to the end of the lead; if he does, he may give himself a hard jerk.

- Outfit your dog with the head halter only during on-leash walks with you or when you're directly supervising him.
- Don't allow your dog to wear 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 head halter.

Adapted from material originally developed by applied animal behaviorists at the Dumb Friends League, Denver, Colorado. ©2000 Dumb Friends League and ©2003 The HSUS. All rights reserved.

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- Positive Reinforcement: Training Your Dog (or Cat!) with Treats and Praise

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