



How to Use a Head Halter

Reprinted with permission from Denver Dumb Friends League.

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 to the halter under his 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 the dog's nose to be turned back toward you making it physically difficult for him to continue pulling. Brand names for head halters include "Gentle Leader," 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 two fingers 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 your dog can get close to. The best strategy is to spend some time desensitizing your dog to wearing it prior to trying to take them for a walk.

How can you desensitize your dog to wearing it?

To get your dog used to the feeling of wearing a head halter, start by slipping the nose piece over your dog's nose and giving him a few cookies. After your dog is comfortable wearing just the nose strap, try buckling the strap behind his ears as well. Put the head halter on, give him a few cookies and then remove the halter. Try this numerous times until your dog is comfortable wearing the head halter around and does not paw at it to get it off. Slow desensitization is important to having your dog be able to wear the halter with ease. Desensitization can take days, and sometimes even weeks to accomplish properly.

Things to remember:

- Make sure the head halter is fit 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. A dog wearing a head halter can still eat, drink, pant, bark and bite.
- Only apply gentle pressure to the leash if you need assistance in getting your dog to move with you when wearing a head halter.
- Don't use the head halter with a retractable lead.
- Keep your dog on a short leash to prevent him from pulling ahead quickly and injuring their neck.
- Your dog should wear his head halter only during on-leash walks with you and/or when you're directly supervising him. Do not leave it on to wear around the house and learn to get off on their own.
- Read the information sheet that comes with your head halter.