

Pulling

Does your dog take **you** for a walk? If he pulls hard on the leash, equipment like head halters and harnesses are a humane way to better control large, strong dogs regardless of your own size and strength.

Head Halter

A head halter (Gentle Leader, Halti, etc) works by letting you steer the dog's head. It is the same idea used for leading around large animals like horses.

The halter is made up of two straps: one that goes around the dog's head (head strap), and one that goes around the dog's nose (nose loop).

Fitting a Head Halter

1. Hook the leash to your dog's regular collar, then step on the leash.
2. Open the head strap and hold one end in each hand. The nose loop should hang down like the letter T.
3. Fit the head strap so it goes snugly around the dog's head just behind the ears. The head strap should be snug enough that only one finger can squeeze under it.
4. Take the head strap off the dog.
5. Pull the nose loop up through the ring, encourage the dog to stick his nose through the nose loop with a treat, and then snap on the already fitted head strap (closing the buckle right behind his ears.)
6. Adjust the nose loop by tightening the buckle. It should be behind the corners of the mouth and loose enough to pull forward to the wet part of his nose, but not so loose that it can be pulled off entirely.



Training Your Dog with a Head Halter

Teaching your dog to love his head halter makes your walks much more enjoyable for you and your dog. It's well worth a little work at the beginning to avoid having your dog stop many times during a walk to paw at his halter.

Exercise 1

1. Hold the head halter up by the nose loop with one hand so your dog notices it. With a treat in your hand, reach through the nose loop and let your dog take the treat. As soon as your dog eats the treat, put the head halter behind your back (out of sight).
2. Repeat this exercise until your dog anticipates the treat by sticking his nose through the nose loop voluntarily.
3. Next, leave the nose loop on your dog's nose for just a fraction of a second more each time before you present the treat. When your dog eagerly pushes his nose through the loop as soon as you present the treat, leave the loop on while you feed several treats in quick succession. This is easiest if your dog looks at you, because it keeps his nose up.
4. When you can leave the nose loop on for 20–30 seconds while delivering a treat every 2–3 seconds, go back to putting it on for just a second, but taking one neck strap around his neck for a second before treating and removing the head halter. Work up to holding both neck straps around his neck (don't buckle them) for several seconds while you deliver treats.

Exercise 2

1. Quickly go through the sequence from exercise 1 of treating your dog through the nose loop, with the nose loop on, and with the straps held up.
2. When you can hold the straps together (almost as if they were buckled) and feed for several seconds, try buckling the straps for a second, giving a great treat, then taking the head halter off. Work up to leaving the head halter buckled for several seconds while you feed treats.
3. Next, let your dog eat the rest of the treats with the head halter on. As soon as he finishes, take the halter off and leave him alone for a few minutes.
4. Feed your dog with the head halter on.
5. Put on the head halter right before you put on your dog's regular collar and leash to go for a walk. Walk him with the head halter on, but don't attach the leash to the halter—use the regular collar.

Exercise 3

1. Now attach the leash to the head halter. Keep your leash as loose as possible, and don't let the leash snap tight at any point. If necessary, it's better to tighten gradually, i.e. reel in your dog smoothly and gently.
2. At some point your dog may try to rub the halter off on the ground. If so, gently bring his head off the ground, releasing the pressure on the leash as soon as he stops pulling toward the ground. Use treats, praise, and happy talk frequently whenever your dog walks with the leash loose.

Front Buckle Harnesses

Front buckle harnesses (Easy Walk, SENSE-ation) give you control over the shoulder and chest area, a dog's center of gravity. They are made up of three straps: One that sits across the dog's back (back strap), one that goes under the stomach right behind the front legs (girth strap), and one that goes across the chest (chest strap).



Fitting a Front Buckle Harness

1. Hook the leash to your dog's regular collar, then step on the leash.
2. Adjust the back strap to raise the side rings until they sit midway on the dog's sides (halfway between the back and the belly).
3. Adjust the girth strap to a snug fit, like a comfortable belt.
4. Reach under the dog with your left hand, grasp the girth strap, and buckle it.
5. Check for comfort room, i.e. that you can easily get one finger under the strap when the dog sits.
6. Adjust both sides of the chest strap to place the leash ring over the breastbone. Don't over-adjust! It's better to have the chest strap a bit loose than too tight. The chest straps should be horizontal only when the dog sits or is on leash.

Information adapted with permission from San Francisco SPCA.

