

## PROTOCOL FOR CHOOSING COLLARS, HEAD COLLARS, HARNESES, AND LEADS

### Identification

One of the main objectives that collars accomplish is identification. All cats and dogs should be “labeled.” There are three main ways to do this and they are not exclusive: (1) collars with tags or embroidered information, (2) tattoos in ears or on thighs, or (3) microchipping.

Tags on a collar can provide information about the client (name, address, and phone number), veterinarian (primarily the phone number), and vaccination status (current rabies vaccine). Embroidered collars usually have the pet’s name and a phone number.

Tattoos are usually made up of the client’s social security number in the United States or of some code. They require at least sedation to execute. The dog or cat then usually wears another tag on its collar indicating the telephone number to call should the animal be separated from its people and need to find its home.

Microchipping is becoming more broadly available, but in Europe and the United Kingdom, the systems are more universal than they are in the United States. Microchips are easy to install, but require the widespread availability of microchip readers. Long-term effects of an implanted, digitally coded device have not been fully evaluated, but—compared to the benefits—the risks appear small in preliminary tests. The general principle behind microchips is that, when scanned, a number is displayed for which ownership data can be obtained by calling a central depot. The animal generally, but not always, wears a tag that indicates that it has been implanted with a chip. The chips are radiopaque, meaning that they will be displayed on a radiograph or X-ray. Microchips may migrate and no long-term studies are available that have investigated or substantiated any common adverse health effects.

Whatever method the client chooses, two factors should be certain: (a) the tags are up-to-date, and (b) they are on a collar that fits safely and comfortably. The latter means that the collar either is a breakaway collar through which one or two fingers can slip comfortably, or that the collar is fitted to be sufficiently loose so that it remains on the animal when the dog or cat puts her head down, but if the collar become entangled, the animal can pull her head out of the collar. If clients are not cautious about the fit of collars, animals can strangle or collars can become imbedded in their skin, resulting in morbidity or mortality. Breakaway collars are particularly important for cats, who are very good at forcing their bodies into small places where a collar could become entangled.

If animals are lost or stolen, labeling may be their only hope of getting home again. And if the township in which the pet lives requires a tag license, the animal’s “label” could be the only thing that saves the animal from impoundment, quarantine, or death.

### Control

Collars, harnesses, et cetera are generally used in dogs for control, but a few words about harnesses and leads for cats will be helpful.

Cats need to be “restrained” when they go to the veterinarian and, if they are indoor cats, when they are out-of-doors.



**Photo 1** A, A breakaway safety collar that is adjusted to the dog’s neck, but with an additional clasp (center) that will release if the collar catches on anything or is grabbed. This collar can be turned into a regular collar simply by clasping the lead to both rings over the clasp.

B, The breakaway safety collar with two Bear Bells added by the client so the client can hear the dog, Picasso, as he moves away.

C, The collar in B on Picasso, the dog who had a tendency to escape the property. Here the bells help alert the clients to the dog’s movements, while the collar protects the dog from hanging from any bush or tree in the woods behind the clients’ property.

They should also be “restrained” when in a car so that they do not become a projectile. Placing them in a crate can accomplish this, but more freedom and exercise can be an excellent idea. All kittens should be fitted with a harness so that they can be encouraged to explore the world. A harness is preferable to a collar because, if fitted correctly, it will not injure the cat, and the cat cannot slip out of it. The younger the cat is when the client fits the cat with a harness, the easier it will be to accustom the cat to it. Once on the harness the cat should be taken for trips in cars, on walks, and for visits to the vet. These activities should occur frequently—they will pay off later when the cat needs care and needs to be tractable. Also, if the cat can safely be taken outside, the cat’s life and the interaction between the cat and client will be enriched. Finally, if cats can safely and comfortably wear harnesses, they can wear seat belts and gain all the stimulation of car rides that was previously the domain of dogs and humans.

### Choker Collars

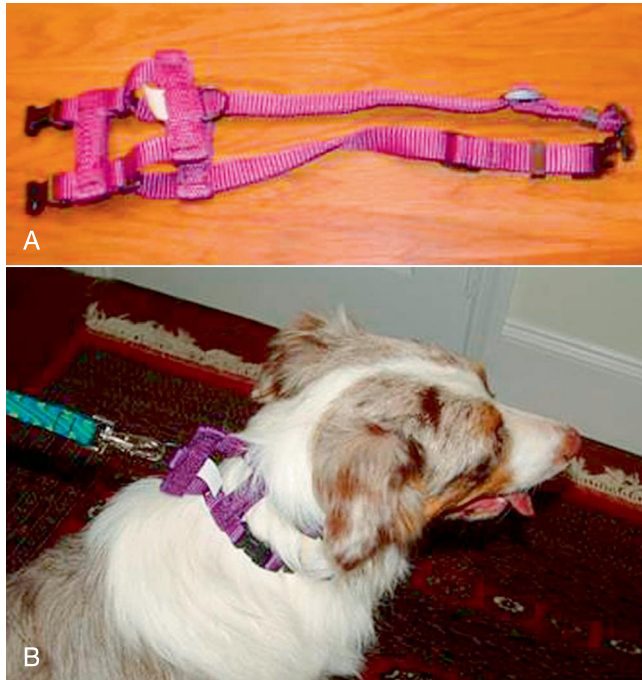
Dogs are often routinely fitted with something like a choker collar as part of a training program. Choker collars are usually either made from chain, leather, or a rolled, braided nylon. When used correctly, choker collars are actually one of the best examples of true “negative reinforcement”: when the dog pulls, the collar tightens and either the sound or smallest amounts of pressure indicate that dog has engaged in an undesirable behavior; when the dog stops, that pressure is

released (and in the case of a chain the sound of slippage occurs) *and* the dog is unimpeded. It is the release from the negative stimulus (the tightening of the collar) that is the reward.

Unfortunately, virtually no one uses choke collars in the described manner. Instead, most dogs placed on chokers “choke.” When they are allowed to pull on the collar and permitted to sustain the pull, these dogs learn to override the choker. In doing so, they are also at risk for laryngeal damage, esophageal damage, and ocular damage (change in the blood vessels in the eye). The dog who pulls harder has no choice: dogs will always push against pressure, which means they will pull harder.

*Traditional choke collars are an idea whose time has passed.* When clients can get past their own misconceptions about how they look or what they mean, they will, with ever-increasing frequency, choose a head collar or a no-pull harness for their dog. Used correctly, these are safer, easier to use, and help teach the dog better behaviors. They are a winning solution that could, and perhaps should, eclipse the choker.

For people whose dogs don’t bite but who dislike the idea of harnesses and head collars, a modified neck collar with a baffle is now available. The Scruffy Guider has two neck straps that can be adjusted for a snug fit. The collar tightens when the dog pulls in a manner similar to a fabric choke collar, but there is a baffle that prevents the collar from tightening beyond the point where it is just flush to the neck. This is not the solution for an out-of-control dog, but it is another tool that may work for some dogs.



**Photo 2** **A**, An unattached Scruffy Guider. **B**, Linus is modeling a fitted Scruffy Guider.

## Head Collars

Head collars are very much like horse halters: they act as a basket that holds the dog’s cheeks and jaws and stay on the dog by fastening high on the back of the neck. There is

generally at least one strap that fits over the bridge of the dog’s nose, and one that fits over the back of the neck. The lead is attached in the middle of the halter, to the nose strap, but under the chin. This is just like how a lead is attached to a horse halter, but is a major change for many people accustomed to attaching a lead directly to something around a dog’s neck. The two major versions of the head collar are the Halti (Photo 3) and the Gentle Leader Canine Head Collar, although there are a growing number of choices, including the Canny Collar (Photo 4). The Halti (Photo 3) is intended to be fitted with a second collar because it fits loosely. It also cannot be as easily tightened by pulling forward, but it fits some very jowly breeds well and snugly. The Gentle Leader and the Blackdog Training Halter give most dogs a better, more secure fit, require no second collar, and can be used with a lead to redirect a dog from inappropriate behaviors and prohibit biting. Most head collars have undergone many improvements in their first decades, including narrower nose straps and ergonomic buckles that resist breakage.

Blackdog makes two styles of wonderfully flexible head collars: the Infi8 (see Photo 5), which is simple to fit and uses a nose piece that softly wraps around the muzzle, allowing easy movement of the dog, and the Training Halter, which allows snug but humane closure of the dog’s mouth (see Photo 6). At this writing, these collars must be ordered from Australia ([www.blackdog.net.au](http://www.blackdog.net.au)).

Because the manufacturer of the Gentle Leader, Premier Pet Products, sold their company in 2010 to Radio Systems Corporation/RSC, the largest manufacturer of electronic and shock collars, a number of trainers, vets, behaviorists, and clients have been looking for other sources of head collars and harnesses from companies that do not use, endorse, or sell products that involve electric shock. A number of alternative products from the growing range of those available are listed here. There are also many head collars and harnesses that are humane and helpful, but only available locally.

At this writing, unless the dog is fat-faced, *two collars best close an aggressive dog’s mouth when used appropriately*: the Gentle Leader (an RSC product) (Photo 7) and the Blackdog Training Halter ([www.blackdog.net.au](http://www.blackdog.net.au)) (Photo 6, D).

Head collars are wonderful for most dogs and people. They spare the dog’s larynx and esophagus, and so are one of the ideal choices—along with harnesses—for dog’s with laryngeal damage, tracheal collapse, or cervical (neck) damage involving disks, bones, nerves, or muscles. Head collars also ride high on the back of the dog’s neck so that when the lead is pulled forward or the dog pulls in the direction opposite to that of the lead, this part of the collar tightens a bit and puts a small amount of steady pressure on this area of the upper neck near the head. Not only is this generally very safe, but this pressure is the exact kind of signal that dogs communicate to other dogs when they wish to control them or stop. So, when the dog is signaled using constant, gentle pressure on the lead, the head collar communicates a “doggy” signal to the dog to stop. No translation is necessary, and the response is quick. For clients who are already working with a behavior modification program, this type of helpful, kind device can be a godsend. If the dog has a mouthing or biting problem, some head collars can be gently pulled forward to firmly, safely, securely, and humanely close the dog’s mouth. When used correctly the collar cannot injure the dog and will allow the client to control most of the dog’s behaviors and stop the dog’s biting.



The best thing about head collars is that anyone—truly anyone, no matter how inexperienced or inept they are with dogs—can safely and humanely walk a dog using a head collar and have it be a mutually enjoyable experience. The leverage that a head collar provides allows children and people with arthritis to walk even unruly dogs—and to enjoy it. If dogs get more exercise, they are calmer, and if people enjoy being with their pets more, they will be more motivated to work with them.

Head collars are a win-win situation, and are increasingly becoming the first collar of choice for a puppy. They are certainly appropriate for **all** life stages and have another advantage over chokers: **they encourage humane behavior from people.** We can use all the kindness and humanity we can learn.

Used incorrectly, as is true for any device, injury can occur. The most common complaint about head collars involves loose-lipped dogs who chew on their lips because the nose piece of the collar fits too tightly. Hair on the nose can also be damaged if this occurs. A good fit is important, and some practice might be needed before the best adjustment of the neck strap and the nose strap is found. Dogs fitted with head collars should be able to comfortably eat, drink, pant, and even bark and bite, if not corrected. There are excellent instructional videos for fitting most head collars. These are **not** muzzles, they are **not** rubber bands around the dog's nose, and they are **not** cruel or inhumane. They are great. Now that these head collars come in designer colors, people should accept them more readily.

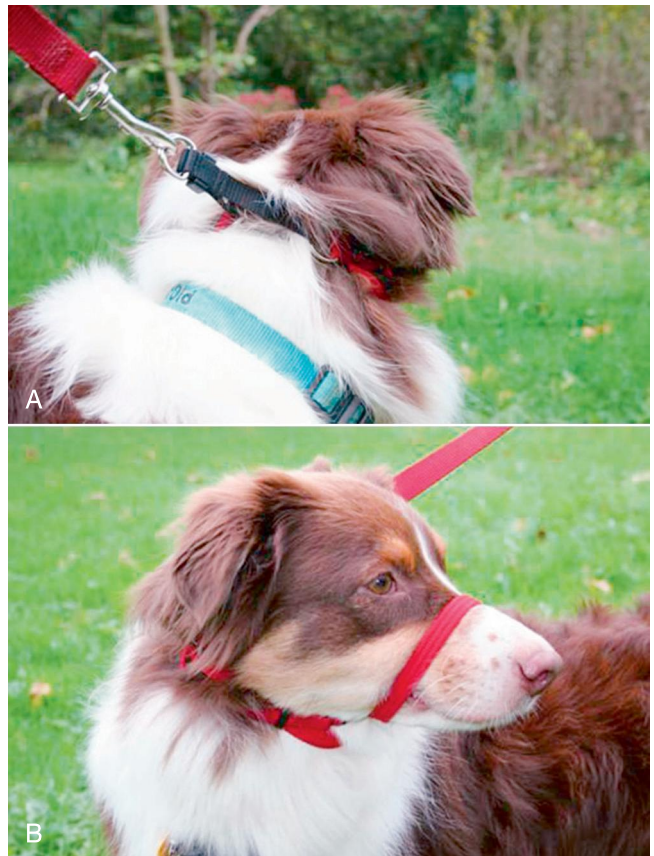


**Photo 3** Austin demonstrating a Halti head collar. This head collar has a jaw strap that many dogs find more comfortable, and it fits many fat-faced dogs, like mastiff breeds, more comfortably than do one-nose-strap head collars. Unless it fits snugly, it may come off (and there is now a martingale adaptation to prevent this risk), and you will not be able to tightly close the dog's mouth, if desired. The lead attaches under the throat with the Halti collar.

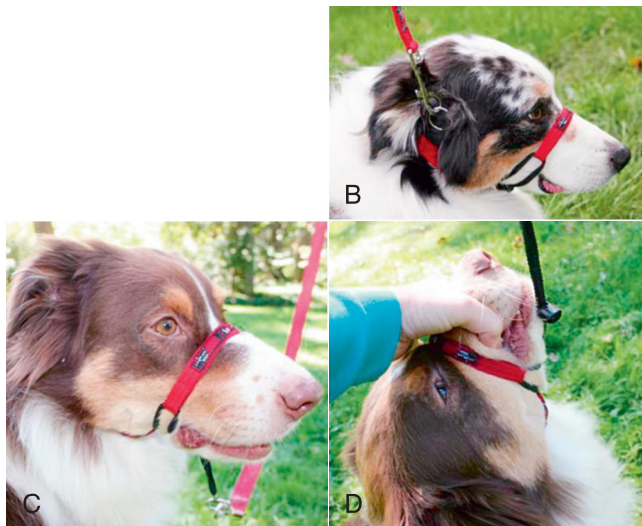
The Blackdog's Training Halter does an excellent job of closing a dog's mouth and maintaining it closed (see Photo 6). This head halter is actually among the easiest to fit, is well tolerated by dogs, and communicates well with the dogs. The webbing is cotton, which means that it doesn't slip once sized. Photo 8 shows a leather version of a quickly adjustable head collar and lead designed for dogs who only sometimes pull, or who may also need to switch between collars quickly. This



**Photo 4** Snap demonstrating a Canny Collar, a type of convertible collar where the nose loop can be incorporated into the collar so that the dog can quickly be wearing a type of flat buckle collar without having to disconnect or remove the head collar. This is a boon to people who have enthusiastic dogs who also may wish to go to a dog park. The lead attaches at the back of the neck with this head collar.



**Photo 5 A.** The Blackdog Inf8 head collar uses a martingale type of attachment for the lead at the back of the neck. **B.** The nose loop of the Inf8 head collar wraps around the nose then clips to the side of the collar allowing the collar to easily adjust to the dog's movement and head shape. These head collars are made of cotton webbing and so are unlikely to slip.



**Photo 6** **A**, The Blackdog's Training Halter has a nose loop that is padded and held in place by easily adjustable mouth and neck pieces (control cords) that are secured under the neck. The lead attaches under the neck so that the dog's mouth can be gently closed, if needed.

**B**, The Blackdog Training Halter fits snugly behind the neck and the lead attaches under the throat to the adjustable control cords, which lock after adjustment to the dog's size and head shape.

**C**, The Blackdog Training Halter used on a dog at rest.

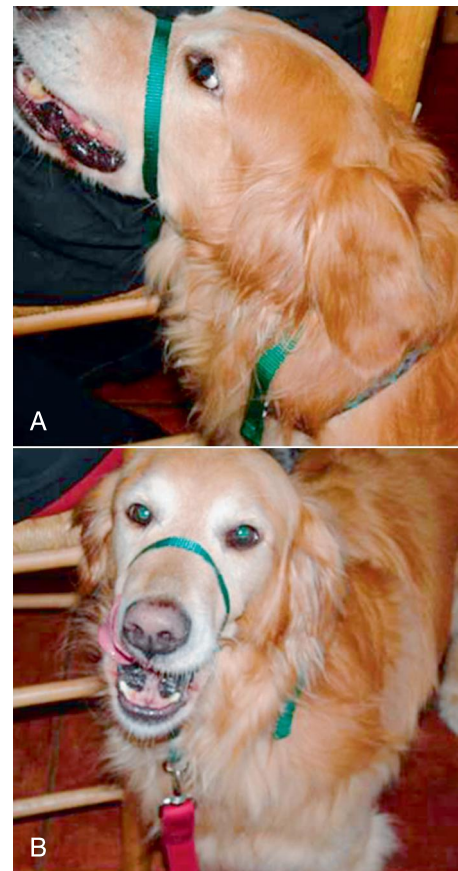
**D**, The Blackdog Training Halter used to hold the mouth shut. The toggle that adjusts to securely fit the nose loop is shown.

collar does not permit the mouth to be closed but is well tolerated by dogs who pull, likely because of the ease and flexibility of fit. Leather must be oiled and maintained to withstand strain.

### No-Pull Harnesses

No-pull harnesses fit under the dog's front legs and loop over the dog's shoulders so that when the dog pulls, its front legs are pulled back and it slows its pace. A number of these harnesses exist: the Lupi, the Sporn/No Pull Harness, the DreamWalker Harness (Photo 9), the Easy Walk Harness (Photo 10), the SENSEation harness (the original no-pull harness; Photo 11), the Blackdog Balance Training Pack (Photo 13), and the Freedom No-Pull Harness from Wiggles, Wags and Whiskers (Photo 12).

The No Pull Harness has a special collar that is sewn with two different-size metal tabs. The loose, leadlike part of the harness fits through one of the loops, and then goes under and around the legs, and is attached to the other loops, under the neck, using a clasp. The lead is then attached to the loose part of the harness over the dog's back. The back part of the harness can be tightened for a better, more responsive fit. The Lupi doesn't have any clasps or tabs, instead relying on a system of concentric loops that are fitted around the dog's front legs and over the back. The lead is then again affixed to the back portion, which slips to tighten if the dog pulls. The Lupi is a little easier to fit to very hairy dogs and for people whose hands are very arthritic. Both of these fitting patterns sound complex and like topological puzzles. They are not. Once clients have the devices in their hands, the fit becomes self-explanatory. Care must be taken with both of these harnesses to ensure that hair is not caught or broken and skin is not abraded.



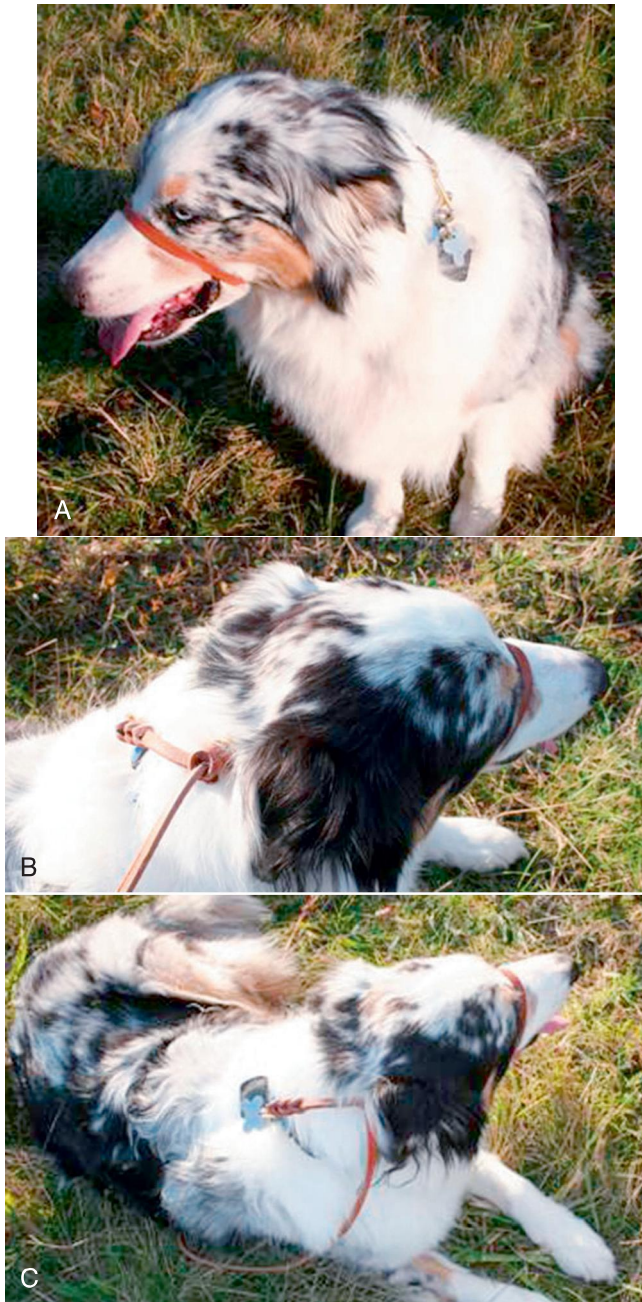
**Photo 7** Austin demonstrating two views of a Gentle Leader head collar.

**A**, Austin showing the snug fit at the top and back of his neck, and the correct placement of the nose loop so that it sits **behind** the corners of the mouth. In this case, the lead attaches under the throat.

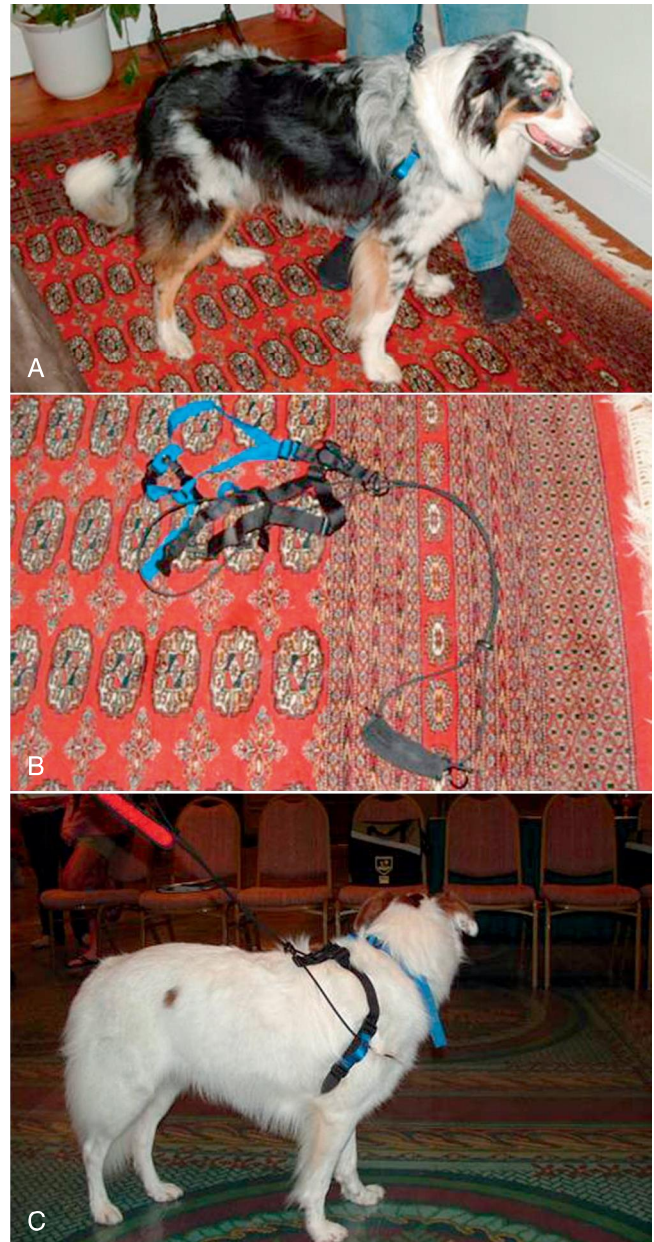
**B**, A front-on view of Austin showing an appropriate fit. The dog can open his mouth, yawn, lick his lips, eat and drink, and even bite someone when no pressure is put on the lead. This snug fit allows the person with the lead to close the dog's mouth and stop or prevent a bite. Premier Pet Products is now wholly owned by Radio Systems Corporation, the largest manufacturer of electronic and shock collars, so many will not wish to purchase their products. For those wishing to buy products from companies that do not use, endorse, or sell products that involve electric shock, see **Photo 6** for an alternative head collar made by Blackdog that can close the dog's mouth.

The SENSEation Harness, the New Freedom Harness, the Balance Training Pack, and the DreamWalker Harness are all "power-steering for dogs." The Blackdog Flyball Racing Harness provides a different type of control and leverage for some dogs and provides a handle, which for some rambunctious dogs is a safety measure. Some of these harnesses are more complex than others to fit. The DreamWalker Harness can challenge anyone's spatial skills, but the instructions are so good and logical that, with a small amount of practice, fitting it makes complete sense. The handle is a little bulky and people accustomed to traditional leads may take a while to get used to it, but for anyone who needs instantaneous control over a dog's movement, this is a great solution. This product is still around but hard to find, as it is being





**Photo 8 A to C,** An easy-to-use and fit version of a leather figure 8 head collar, The Infinity Lead, is being made as a prototype by Service Dog Designs, which makes custom equipment for service/assistant dogs and their partners. This simple head collar is designed so that the lead attaches at the top of the neck, behind the head. A lanyard attaches it to the dog's neck collar for additional security. Leather requires special care, and anyone using leather leads, harnesses, collars, or head collars should know and meet these care needs. This prototype has huge potential, given its simple on-off assembly, its ease of fitting, how readily dogs take to it, and how well it manages pulling. **A,** The nose loop is snugly fitted over Toby's nose by adjusting a leather connector under Toby's chin. **B,** The back part of the figure 8, the neck loop, is slipped over the head behind the ears and gently snugged at the bottom of the skull/top of the neck using the leather ratchet. The lanyard attachment that can hook to a regular neck collar is seen in **A** and **B.** **C,** the entire lead and head collar as it would be used is seen, complete with lanyard attached to a regular neck collar.

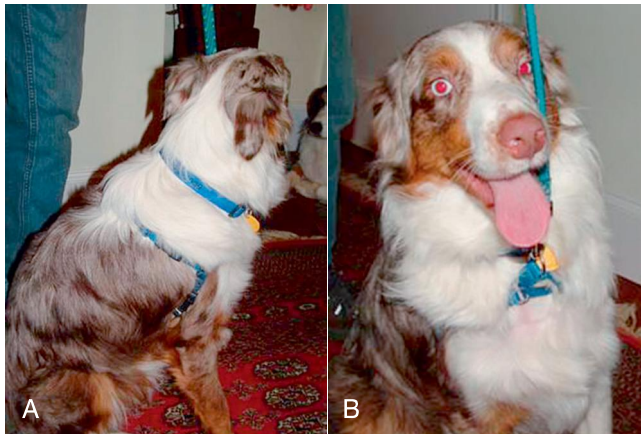


**Photo 9 A,** Toby demonstrating the DreamWalker Harness. The instructions make this fit easy to understand, and if the harness is stored correctly, putting it on the dog each time is not a challenge. **B,** Toby's already fitted/sized DreamWalker Harness as it comes off the dog. You can see why reading the instructions and practice are so important for getting this on the dog correctly and quickly. **C,** A DreamWalker Harness that is well fitted to a border collie showing the set of cords that help with steering.

"orphaned." The concepts are so good that one should expect to see a reinvention of it soon.

No-pull harnesses are wonderful for dogs who pull or lunge. These are **not** appropriate devices to fit to a dog whose biggest problem is biting, nipping, or grabbing as they do nothing to control the dog's mouth or head. Furthermore, reaching around the dog's head and neck to fit these harnesses could be dangerous if the dog is aggressive to people.





**Photo 10** **A** and **B**, Linus models the Gentle Leader Easy Walk Harness. **A** shows the adjustable straps that go across the back and under the chest. **B** shows the adjustable strap that fits across the front of the chest and that can tighten to put mild pressure on the dog's shoulders, telling him he should slow. Note in **B** that Linus's lead is attached to a ring in the center of the chest strap. Sizing can be tricky with these harnesses and the amount of hardware in the front can cause the harness to sag on some dogs. For these dogs, the SENSEation harness or custom-fitted ones from Wiggles, Wags, and Whiskers may be preferable. Because the manufacturer of the Gentle Leader, Premier Pet Products, sold their company to Radio Systems Corporation/RSC, the largest manufacturer of electronic and shock collars, a number of trainers, vets, behaviorists, and clients have been looking for other sources of head collars and harnesses from companies that do not use, endorse, or sell products that involve electric shock. A number of alternative products from the growing range of those available are listed here.

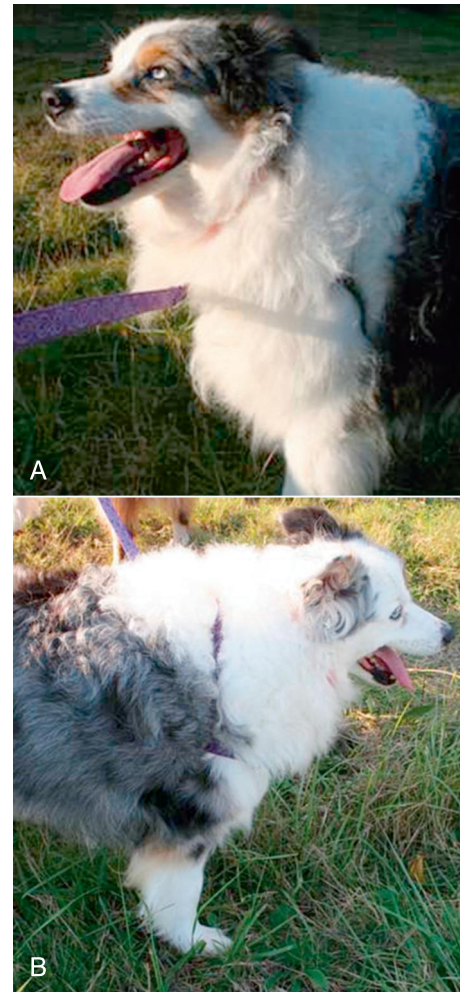
When fitted correctly, these harnesses will easily allow children and people with arthritis to pleasurably and calmly walk their dogs if the dogs are not huge and strong. Huge, strong dogs, especially those who are poorly or unmannered can override these and end up dragging their person down the street while inflicting self-induced rope burns. These “no-pull” harnesses, like head collars, spare the dog's neck so that dogs with laryngeal, tracheal, esophageal, or spine problems can be more safely exercised.

Caution is urged against fitting no-pull harnesses too tightly: too tight a fit could impede circulation in the dog's front legs. Fortunately, this is difficult to accomplish.

### Regular Harnesses

Regular harnesses fit around the dog's chest, and avoid any pressure on the neck when the lead is pulled. They are purely devices to attach the dog to the lead, and offer no chance for correction of undesirable behaviors. Many dogs do not pull or lunge when walked, and just need to be protected from the world and to comply with lead laws. For these dogs regular harnesses are fine. They can also work well for small dogs who perform undesirable lead behaviors, but who are too small to really cause what the client would consider to be a problem. In fact, some of the harnesses for smaller dogs have built-in “handles” so that the dog can be picked up by the client should they need to be removed from a situation or placed in a car.

Regular harnesses are **not** good choices for large dogs who are not absolutely perfectly behaved because they provide the



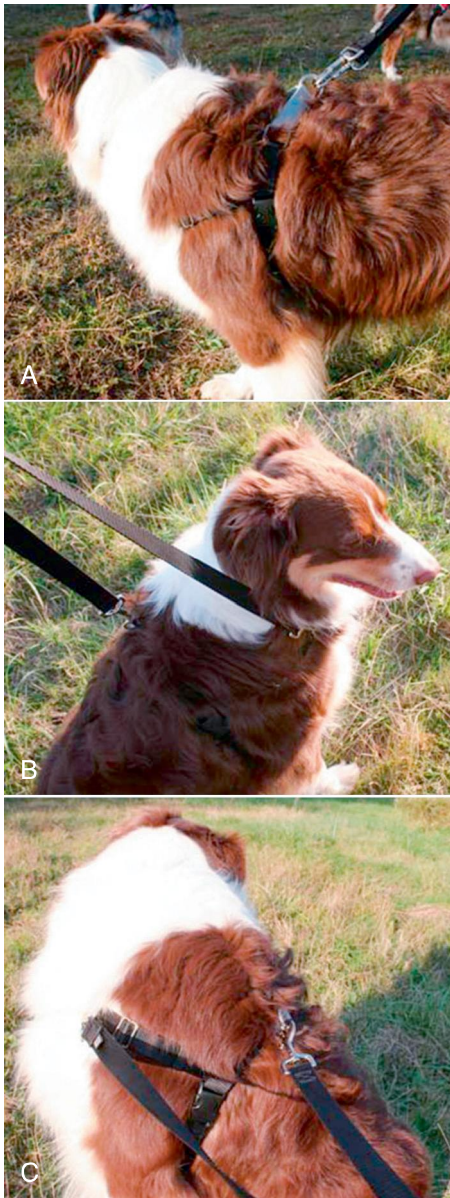
**Photo 11** **A**, Bunny is wearing a SENSEation Harness. The front attachment is clear. The hardware in this no-pull harness is not bulky and fits smoothly against the chest. Bunny is older, arthritic, and small, so this is helpful. **B**, You can see that the SENSEation Harness is fitted so that the angles on the shoulders are as recommended in the instructions, which are excellent. This fit allows fully unimpeded shoulder and forelimb girdle motion.

client with little control. In fact, big, highly motivated dogs will actually be able to use the harness to push into the situation from which their people are trying to drag them because their shoulders are unrestrained. This is only beneficial if a sled is involved in the exercise you give your dogs. Clients often choose harnesses because they want to protect the dog's neck. This is a good idea, but head collars and no-pull harnesses are a better solution for dogs who feel the call of the wild and absolutely “must” pull.

### Prong or Pinch Collars

Prong collars are subject to all of the same criticisms as chokers. Furthermore, they can do incredible damage to the dog's neck because they can become imbedded in the skin if the dog learns to override them. Most dogs learn to override these collars and people who use them often voluntarily comment that they need to use some degree of pain to control their animals under some circumstances. These collars, if sharpened, as is often the case, are intended to employ pain to encourage the dog to attend to the person. If left





**Photo 12** **A**, The back lead attachment of the Wiggles, Wags, and Whiskers Freedom No-Pull Harness with both leads attached to it is shown. A single lead could also attach here. Note that the buckle is well away from the shoulder and front arm motion. **B** and **C** show Picasso with one of the leads attached to the back lead attachment and one to the front lead attachment for more control.

unsharpened, these collars are intended to provide more uniform pressure than a choke collar. Oddly, prong collars were intended to be a safer improvement over choke collars. That's not how it has worked. For aggressive dogs, this uniform pressure response—especially if accompanied by pain—can worsen their aggression, and for dominantly aggressive dogs, this response can not only worsen their aggression, but can endanger the client. Were people to understand more about how dogs communicate and how these collars work, they would appreciate that responses other than pain and pressure are more desirable for changing an animal's behavior. These collars are no substitute for early intervention and the treatment of problem behaviors. For



**Photo 13** **A**, Linus is wearing the Blackdog version of a no-pull harness that fits across the chest below the neck and behind the front legs. **B**, The double-ended lead can attach only in one location or both on the dorsum and under the neck.

every situation involving reactivity and/or aggression for which clients claim control is provided by a prong collar, a head collar is the better, safer, and more humane choice, although it requires some investment of time to use correctly.

Some dogs are fitted with prong or spike collars because they make the dog look “tough.” The problem, here, does not lie with the dog.

### Shock Collars

**Shock should not be used to “train” dogs or as a treatment for behavioral concerns.** The use of shock collars for this purpose is now illegal in numerous locations worldwide (e.g., Wales and the state of New South Wales, Australia).

Based on the peer-reviewed, scientific literature consisting of multiple, data-based studies of both laboratory and owned dogs, study authors and specialists have recommended that *no dog should wear a shock collar to correct an inappropriate behavior except on the qualified recommendation of a specialist in behavioral medicine.* This conclusion is based on situations where the shock was well controlled and tested in a controlled setting—circumstances considerably more conservative than the “real world.” This means that such recommendations apply even more strongly to the “real-world” situation, and that a recommendation by a qualified specialist will be rare, indeed. This is equivalent to saying that **no dog should wear**





**Photo 14** **A**, By providing a solid Y-front against Toby's chest, the Blackdog Flyball Racing Harness provides additional guidance for the dog and encourages the dog to pull less. **B**, This harness provides the safety of a handle so that the dog can be stopped, if needed.

**a shock collar.** Certainly, no client should self-prescribe a shock collar for their dog to control an unruly or aggressive behavior. In at least one clinical specialty practice of veterinary behavioral medicine, dogs who were "treated" with shock prior to assessment all were euthanized for worsening behavior that could be linked to the shock administered.

Given the correct reward and timing circumstances, and the appropriate level of shock, all animals can learn avoidance behaviors from the application of a painful shock. There is an entire literature in the psychology of learning that is based in shock. However, the application of shock (and shock collars are intended to be painful) is an absolutely inappropriate treatment for aggression and fear because it hurts and is scary and because it teaches the recipient only to avoid or cease an associated behavior without teaching them what behavior is appropriate and desirable. The use of shock collars will invariably make problematic behaviors worse, render the dog less predictable, and potentially endanger the client.

There is no role for shock in basic training and manners training of dogs and cats.



**Photo 15** **A**, The dog is wearing a prong collar and acts more uncertainly when on it. **B**, The same dog when fitted with a no-pull harness. These profound behavioral changes are common.

Even police and attack dogs are now seldom trained using shock. In these most valuable of dogs positive reinforcement, including clicker training, has largely replaced compulsion training. Data show that all dogs who are shocked experience adverse alterations in the neurochemicals involving stress and distress, leading researchers to conclude that it is painful for the dogs receiving shocks, and that the shocks affect how dogs respond to people long-term. Such findings were noted even in the most flawless of police dogs. Simply, every time a dog is shocked that dog and its neurochemistry are damaged.

Most people who use shock collars either want a quick fix or need to absolutely control their dog. The former will not work for dogs with problem behaviors. The latter is problematic for other reasons.

There *may* be some *rare theoretical exceptions* where shock collars *may* be used rationally to change or shape a dog's behavior *if and only if that behavior is dangerous to the dog and if the behavior is recently acquired*. Under these extremely restrictive and rare conditions, the scientific literature shows that very few (1 to 3) shocks would be sufficient to cause an avoidance or cessation response. An easier, cheaper alternative to shocking the dog is to simply protect the dog from the behavior that is injurious. By the time most people learn that shock is not helpful, they have done profound harm.

*Anyone considering using a shock collar for their dog needs to seek professional help from a specialist in behavioral medicine immediately.* No specialist recommends shock collars, but if the client's concern is sufficiently severe that they are considering shock, the specialist can provide competent assessment and alternative humane and effective solutions.



Neither shock collars nor prong collars should be the training collar of first resort—to do so is inhumane and negligent. Dogs who are troubled respond especially poorly to shock and so these collars should not be the choice of last resort, either. People who wish to use these collars require the help of a specialist and should get that help as soon as possible before injury or death occurs. Clients need to remember that good behavior is not based on compulsion, brutality, fear, or domination; it is based on a willingness to acquiesce to another's desires. Where pets are concerned, that's a two-way interaction.

## Leads

Finally, a few words on lead choice will be useful.

- Avoid metal/chain leads. They will absolutely injure your hands. They are heavy. They can become weapons when yanked free. If the dog chews on the lead and you are there, you can ask him to stop and redirect him to an appropriate chewing vehicle. If the dog chews and you are not present, the dog should not be leaved or tied. In some areas of the United States, tying a dog is illegal. The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) has finally taken a stand, saying that tying is not an appropriate form of restraint for dogs. Tied dogs can choke, become more aggressive, injure themselves, and generally just have a miserable life. Why would you tie a companion you chose for its sociability?
- Leather leads are soft—if kept cleaned and oiled with leather products—and have a good weight, but may be too thin for children or anyone with arthritis. Also, the stitching in leather leads can let go as the leather ages and cracks: one hard tug from the dog and the lead is broken and the dog is gone. If you like leather leads, maintain them and check for strength and damage often.
- Nylon fabric (webbing/mesh) leads have truly come of age. They come in a variety of widths, colors, and designs and are washable and durable. One drawback to nylon fabric is that it can slip with time and pressure. Equipment should be checked frequently. The Blackdog products are made of cotton webbing so that they do not slip. If cotton becomes wet, it is difficult to adjust, so the situation in which the tool is to be used should be considered. Both nylon and cotton webbing are harder to chew through than is a leather lead. That said, any head collar or harness can fail. Occasional defects occur even in well-maintained tools (see Photo 16). Responsible manufacturers will repair or replace equipment that does not perform as promised, as was the case for the pictured head collar.
- Retractable leads have become very popular. They are fine **only if** your dog is either (a) tiny enough to be picked up in one arm **and** (b) sufficiently well-behaved to come when you ask him to do so. If your dog meets these conditions, you don't need a retractable lead and will do better with one of light webbing. Otherwise, **retractable leads are weapons**. The mechanism by which the lead is held is heavy and not appropriate for people with arthritis or any strength-sapping condition or for small children. If the lead is pulled from your hand, it can wedge into something, resulting in a harsh, abrupt, and potentially injurious stop for the dog. The mechanism can also hit another dog or human and do damage. If the dog is poorly behaved



**Photo 16** As with all equipment, check your leads, harnesses, collars, and head collars routinely for damage and replace anything that is questionable. Nothing lasts forever, defects occur, and wear is normal. This head collar suddenly tore across a stitched area, but no one was injured. Most companies will replace products that fail like this one did.

or just clueless, the ever-extending lead can result in a literal tie-up of people and dogs. These situations are just ripe for dog fights. Finally, just because the dog can run out further, does not mean that they will return. Unless the dog has good recall skills these leads are not useful unless they come equipped with a winch. None do. In a poorly behaved dog, these leads are an invitation to behave even more poorly. Addressing such behaviors is more fully covered in the *Protocol for Teaching "Sit," "Stay," and "Come."*

## Final Suggestions

Whatever style of lead you get, please think about the following.

- Have more than one lead, especially if you have children. When you most need it you will not be able to get the lead. A dog without a lead is just waiting to get hit by a car, and if you can't take the time to look for the lead, you are likely pretty agitated and rushed. No lead, no time, no patience—it's a guaranteed recipe for disaster. Keep a spare lead in a reliable place, whether it's a hook by the door, a drawer, a glove bin, the car, et cetera. In fact, with kids, encourage them to have their own color leads and head collars for walking the dog so that they always know where the lead is.
- If you are using a head collar, hang the lead and the collar up as a unit when not in use. In an emergency you can find it quickly. Again, a spare complete set is reasonable and one can be kept in every car.
- Put an extra lead, along with a dish, a blanket, and a bottle of water in each of your cars. Someday someone will just put the dog in the car, the car will break down, it will be hot, and you will have no control of the dog on a busy highway without this "emergency backup." Why risk the tragedy?
- Never, ever leave a dog tied, restrained, or with the potential to be ensnared with a lead/collar. Even if you are just crating a dog for 30 minutes, take the collar off unless it





**Photo 17** Hemorrhage in the sclera of eyes of a dog whose ID collar became entangled with her housemate's collar during a play bout. A human was present and quickly disentangled the dogs, but this damage was already done. Had the dogs been unattended, one or both of them could have died. These dogs will no longer wear collars when indoors. (Photo courtesy of Dr. Soraya Juarbe-Diaz.)

slips over the dog's head or is a breakaway. Do not allow anyone to place your dog in a run with a lead, which will catch on something, or with a collar that cannot release or come off. Do not leave your dog in the car unless the collar can release or come off, and do not leave the lead attached to the collar while the dog is alone in the car. Do not allow your dog to play with other dogs unless his collar can somehow release. By now, you can see the pattern of concern: every year dogs strangle, hang, die painfully, or become severely injured by collars or other animals with whom they become ensnared. Such tragedies can be minimized by forethought.

- Your standard walking lead will be 4- to 6-feet long. Please remember that this is shorter than the average inter-personal approach distances for any but toy dogs. The average inter-personal approach distance or "personal space" for most dogs is 1 to 1.5 body lengths. If your dog is worried about other dogs or people, the short lead will not allow them to find a space where she can get away. If you aren't walking the dog in a congested urban area, consider a longer lead; leads come in increments up to 50 feet. This way, if the dog is on a head collar or a no-pull harness, the lead can be slack enough that they can have enough space to safely withdraw from the individual who distresses them, while you still have control because of the head collar.
- If you need to teach your dog to come back to you, use a long lead and roll up the slack in big loops in one hand. People make the mistake of letting their dog off-lead and expect the dog to magically return. Why? The dog can always come back—he cannot always run free. A very long lead allows the dog to run variable distances and to receive a slight physical signal (the tug on the head collar), coupled to a verbal signal, to return. Briefly, if the dog is leashed

and on a head collar, you can throw a toy 5 feet and tell Muffy to "get it." When she stops to pick it up, tell her she's great, slap your thigh or whistle or click, et cetera, and ask her to "come." If she doesn't return immediately, tug gently on the lead so that she is looking at you and repeat your request in an encouragingly exciting manner. If Muffy hasn't already been taught by you to ignore you, she'll likely come. When she's back, tell her she's brilliant, reward her with a treat or a pat, and throw the toy. When she is perfect for 5 feet, let her have a little more lead. If you increase the recall distance she'll likely not need to be reeled in, but if she does need to be reeled in, you can gently gather the lead hand-over-hand while encouraging her to "come."

- Only when she is always perfect should you consider letting her off-lead. Even then—think carefully. Assess the risks of cars, ill-mannered or dangerous dogs, enticing stimuli (e.g., cats, squirrels, deer, the neighbors' kids), bratty children, horses, et cetera. In urban areas, there has been a movement to create fenced dog runs where nice dogs can run together. When done correctly this is a brilliant and humane idea.

## Product Sources

### SENSEation harness

[www.softtouchconcepts.com/products/harness-over-view.php](http://www.softtouchconcepts.com/products/harness-over-view.php)

### Locatis

[http://locatis.typepad.com/home/2005/11/front\\_clip\\_harn.html](http://locatis.typepad.com/home/2005/11/front_clip_harn.html)

### The Freedom No-Pull Harness from Wiggles, Wags, and Whiskers

[www.wiggleswagswhiskers.com/newsite/freedom-no-pull-harness.htm](http://www.wiggleswagswhiskers.com/newsite/freedom-no-pull-harness.htm)

### Blackdog Gear:

Balance Harness and Balance Training Pack (with 2 leads): [www.blackdog.net.au](http://www.blackdog.net.au)

Inf8 Halter and Training Halter (go to the website and watch the videos to choose): [www.blackdog.net.au](http://www.blackdog.net.au)

### Canny Collar

[www.cannycollars.co.uk](http://www.cannycollars.co.uk)

### Scuffy Guider

[www.mistypinesdogpark.com](http://www.mistypinesdogpark.com)

### Halti head collar

[www.companyofofanimals.us/products/halti/halti-head-collar](http://www.companyofofanimals.us/products/halti/halti-head-collar)

*Custom products, including prototype leather head collars, service dog harnesses, and many other humane products that require custom approaches*

[www.servicedogdesigns.com](http://www.servicedogdesigns.com); [www.boldleaddesigns.com](http://www.boldleaddesigns.com)

### Gentle Leader

[www.premier.com](http://www.premier.com) (parent company: Radio Systems Corporation/RSC [www.petsafe.net](http://www.petsafe.net))

### Easy Walk Harness

[www.premier.com](http://www.premier.com) (parent company: Radio Systems Corporation/RSC [www.petsafe.net](http://www.petsafe.net))