

Ban Squishy Eye Syndrome!

A head collar can be a wonderful tool to use when walking with your dog. We certainly recommend and use them here at Guide Dogs. The concept behind a head collar is that when you lead a dog's head, their body will follow (much like the halter on a horse). They are an effective way to stop your dog from pulling while walking on leash (we've all seen people out with their dogs and wondered, "Who is walking who?" - right?). The collars are designed to allow the dog full freedom of movement (they can even eat or drink while wearing one).

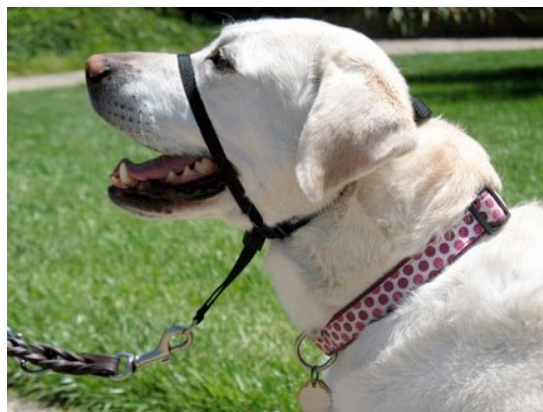
So yes - we love them - they are great! But they do require some skill on the part of the dog handler (ahem... yes, that means YOU!). There are basically two things you need pay attention to when using a head collar: 1 - technical skill, and 2 - focus.

Technical skill: Basically, you need to know the right (and the wrong) way to put on a head collar. There are many different brands of head collars, and each one varies in how they should be worn. Make sure you follow the directions for the specific brand of head collar that you are using - and consult a professional dog trainer if you need instruction. Without a proper fit, you may experience unnecessary problems - excessive pawing, rubbing and resistance, or chafing of the nose.

For the purposes of this post, we'll demonstrate the fit of the Gentle Leader® brand:

- The nose loop needs to be as loose and comfortable as possible, moving freely from just in front of the dog's eyes to the beginning of the fleshy part of his nose - but NOT so loose that it can come off.
- The proper fit of the nose loop is totally dependent on the proper fit of the neck strap, which must be high at the very top of the neck (touching the skull) and very snug (only one finger barely squeezes underneath) so that it cannot rotate. (If the neck strap rotates, so will the nose loop, which may cause chafing of the skin.)
- When properly fitted and viewed from the side, the Gentle Leader® will resemble a "V" for Victory, not an "L" for Loser.

Doesn't this look great?



Focus: Using a head collar is all well and good, but all your good intentions and attention to a proper fit will go out the window if you aren't paying attention to your dog. Yes, that's right – YOU need to focus on what your dog or pup is doing when it's wearing a head collar in order for the equipment to be effective. Your dog should be walking with a loose leash, so as to not put tension on the head collar and cause the dreaded, cringe-worthy "Squishy Eye Syndrome!" (Ouch!)



A couple points to ponder:

- Are you walking your dog with a loose leash? Is your dog looking straight ahead, or are you pulling a little bit too much causing the dog's head to strain sideways?
- Pay special attention to your dog when you're descending steps – is your dog straining with its head up?

Used correctly, a head collar can make an incredible difference in your dog's ability to focus and learn. Used incorrectly, it speaks VOLUMES about YOUR abilities as a dog handler.

When you see a dog with Squishy Eye Syndrome, please be sure to point it out to the handler so they can learn how to use the head collar correctly. Their dog or pup will thank you for it!

Reprinted from Guide Dogs for the Blind, Guide Dogs' Blog