

Dog Collars

Which Type is Best For Your Dog?

The Humane Society of the United States



Every dog needs a collar, chiefly because he needs something to hang his ID, license, and rabies vaccination tag on (and leash, of course). There are so many styles of collar out there that it's easy to get one that reflects your dog's (or your) personality.

Collars serve purposes beyond identification and decoration, most of which have to do with training. Not all of them are appropriate for all (or even any) dogs. Read on to find which collar would best suit your pup.

Regular collars

Aversive collars

Special-use collars

Regular collars

Flat

This is the standard collar for dogs. It has a buckle or plastic snap ("quick-release") closure and a ring for attaching identification tags and/or leash and is available in many colors and designs. A flat collar should fit comfortably tight on your dog's neck. It should not be so tight as to choke your dog nor so loose that he can slip out of it. The rule of thumb says you should be able to get two fingers underneath the collar.

Martingale

The martingale collar is also known as a limited-slip collar. This collar is designed for dogs with narrow heads such as Greyhounds and other sighthounds (such as the Afghan hound, Saluki, and whippet). It is also useful for a dog of any breed who is adept at slipping out of his collar.

The martingale consists of a length of material with a metal ring at each end. A separate loop of material passes through the two rings. The leash attaches to a ring on this loop. When your dog tries to back out of the martingale, the collar tightens around his neck. If the collar is properly adjusted, it will tighten just to the size of your dog's neck and won't choke him.

Head collar

The head collar is similar in principle to a horse's halter. One strap of the collar fits around your dog's neck and sits high on the head, just behind the ears. The other strap of the collar forms a loop around your dog's muzzle. The leash attaches to ring at bottom of muzzle loop.

The head collar is good for strong, energetic dogs that both jump and pull. Because the halter is around your dog's muzzle, instead of neck, your dog loses a great deal of leverage and he will be unable to pull on the leash with the full weight of his body.

To be effective, the head collar must be properly fitted. And to be safe, make sure not to yank your dog's leash while he's wearing a head halter. Some manufacturers include instructions and a DVD with the collar. Otherwise, ask your dog trainer or a knowledgeable sales clerk for assistance with fitting. Proper fit and use should minimize the risk of injury to your dog.

It may take some time, patience, and lots of treats to get your dog accustomed to wearing a head collar. Put it on him for short periods until your dog is comfortable in the collar. Then he should only wear it when you are taking him out on a leash. Don't leave the head collar on your dog all the time; eventually he will manage to pull off the muzzle loop and use it as his chew toy!

Aversive collars

Some trainers use aversive collars to train "difficult" dogs with correction or punishment. These collars rely on physical discomfort or even pain to teach the dog what not to do. They suppress the unwanted behavior but don't teach him what the proper one is. At best, they are unpleasant for your dog, and at worst, they may cause your dog to act aggressively and even bite you. Positive training methods should always be your first choice.

Choke chain

As the name implies, this collar is made of metal links and is designed to control your dog by tightening around your dog's neck. It is supposed to sit high up on the dog's neck just behind his ears.

Unlike the martingale collar, there is no way to control how much the choke chain tightens so it's possible to choke or strangle your dog. It can also cause other problems, too, such as injuries to the trachea and esophagus, blood vessels in the eyes, neck sprains, nerve

damage, fainting, transient paralysis, and even death.

It is best for your dog to avoid using a choke chain. More humane collars and good obedience training should make it unnecessary to resort to this aversive collar.

If you insist on using one, consult an experienced trainer to learn how to properly size, fit, and use it. And never leave a choke chain on your dog as his regular collar; the chain could catch on something and choke your dog!

[Shop for dog collars, tags, and leashes at Humane Domain, our online store »](#)

Prong or pinch

The prong or pinch collar is similar in style to the martingale. The control loop that the leash is attached to is made of chain. The loop that fits around your dog's neck is made of a series of fang-shaped metal links, or prongs, with blunted points. When the control loop is pulled, the prongs pinch the loose skin of your dog's neck.

Like the choke chain, the prong collar must be properly fitted. The size of the prong links should be appropriate for the size of your dog. The collar should sit high up on your dog's neck just behind his ears. The fit should be snug so the prong links can't shift to the front of your dog's neck where they might pinch your dog's trachea.

More humane collars and good obedience training should make it unnecessary to resort to this aversive collar. If you insist on using one, consult an experienced trainer to learn how to properly size, fit, and use it.

Shock

Shock collars use electric current passing through metal contact points on the collar to give your dog a signal. This electric signal can range from a mild tickling sensation to a painful shock.

Shock collars are sold as training devices and to stop barking. They are also used with pet containment (electronic fencing) systems.

The least humane and most controversial use of the shock collar is as a training device. The trainer can administer a shock to a dog at a distance through a remote control. There is a greater chance for abuse (delivery of shocks as punishment) or misuse (poor timing of shocks). Your dog also may associate the painful shock with people or other experiences, leading to fearful or aggressive behavior.

Electronic fencing uses shock collars to deliver a shock when the dog approaches the boundaries of the "fenced" area. Typically, the shock is preceded by a tone to warn the dog he is about to get shocked.

Caution! Shock collars can cause irritation and inflammation of your dog's neck skin. To

avoid problems:

- Don't leave the electronic collar on for an extended length of time.
- Clean your dog's neck and the contact points that touch your dog's neck regularly.

Special-use collars

Bark control

Though several types of collars are available to control excessive or unwanted barking, none of them address the root cause of the barking. Dogs can bark for several reasons, such as fear or territorial behavior. Though some bark collars may reduce barking, they will not reduce the stress that causes a dog to bark.

•**Spray:** Barking causes these collars to emit a burst of citronella or air which interrupts and deters your dog from barking. Spray collars sometimes don't react to high-pitched barks, making them ineffective.

Tip: Don't use a spray collar when your dog is with other dogs. Another dog's bark may trigger your dog's collar.

•**Shock:** The least humane is the shock collar which delivers an electrical shock to your dog when he barks.

•**Ultrasonic:** When your dog barks, the ultrasonic collar interrupts him by emitting a sound only your dog can hear.

[More on why dogs bark »](#)

[How to get your dog to quiet down »](#)

Flea/tick

This collar is impregnated with chemicals and helps protect your dog against fleas and ticks. It is worn in addition to a regular collar. The flea/tick collar is effective for only a short time and must be replaced periodically.

Vibrating

Use vibration, not electric shock, to get your dog's attention. Vibrating collars can be useful to train a deaf dog who can't hear your voice or a clicker.

Elizabethan

The Elizabethan collar, or E-collar as it is often called, is a wide, plastic, cone-shaped collar used to prevent your dog from licking or scratching wounds while they heal.

Typically there are tabs or loops on the Elizabethan collar so it can be attached to your dog's regular collar. Some models have hook and loop closures to secure it. These collars come in a variety of sizes to ensure proper fit for your dog. He should be able to eat and drink with the collar in place but not be able to get at the injury.

GPS

This collar uses global positioning satellite technology to help locate your pet if he gets