

# Keeping Control

## Choosing The Correct Collar

By: Stephanie Bennett, CPDT-KSA, co-founder of Peace, Love & Dogs, [www.peacelovedogshouston.com](http://www.peacelovedogshouston.com)

**B**uckles, halters, and prongs... Oh my! With so many options, choosing the right collar for your dog can be quite daunting. If staring down the collar aisle at your pet store makes your head spin, then read on.

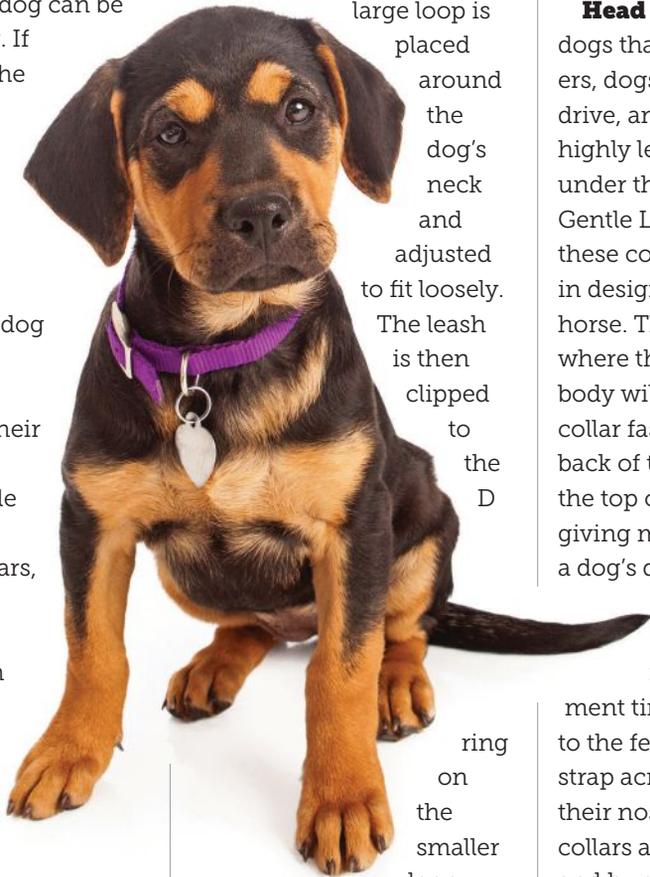
**Flat Buckle Collar** - Every dog should have a regular buckle collar to hold their identification and tags. Buckle collars are not correction collars, meaning they do not tighten when the leash is pulled. This may be the only collar some dogs ever need for training.



**Martingale Collars** - Good for dogs that are susceptible to slipping out of a regular buckle collar and is a good choice for everyday walking. Adjusted properly, a martingale collar never

chokes, but constructs snugly to prevent escape. A martingale collar is made

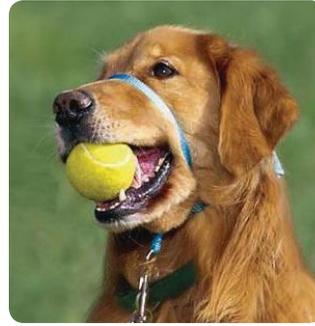
with two loops. The large loop is placed around the dog's neck and adjusted to fit loosely. The leash is then clipped to the D



ring on the smaller loop.

When the dog tries to pull their head out of the collar, the tension on the leash pulls the small loop taut, which makes the large loop smaller and tighter on the neck, preventing escape. Martingale collars are an effective and humane tool, but because of the double loop that could get caught on objects or other

dogs jaws, they should never be left on your dog unsupervised.



**Head Collar** - Good for dogs that are forceful pullers, dogs with high prey drive, and/or dogs that are highly leash reactive. Sold under the brand names Gentle Leader and Halti, these collars are similar in design to a halter for a horse. The idea being that where the head goes, the body will follow. A head collar fastens around the back of the neck and over the top of the muzzle, giving more control over a dog's direction and the intensity of pulling. Most dogs need an adjust-

ment time to get used to the feeling of the thin strap across the bridge of their nose. Although head collars are a very effective and humane training tool, it is important to follow all instructions carefully. If a dog is jerked suddenly by the leash attached to the head collar, the dog's neck is pulled sharply to the side, which could result in neck injury. Consequently, a head collar should never be combined with a retractable leash.

**Harnesses** - Good for toy breeds or dogs that

may have specific health issues such as a sensitive throat and/or trachea. Harnesses are also recommended for safety reasons when teaching dog activities such as running on the treadmill or running next to a bike. Otherwise, a harness is typically not a great training choice. When the leash attachment is on the back, the handler has much less control and the dog's



natural opposition reflex is amplified. "Opposition reflex" basically means that if a dog is pulled in one direction, they will automatically pull in the other direction.

### SENSE-ation Harness

- This harness offers much more control as the leash attachment is located on the chest. It is also a good choice for dogs that are pullers, but particularly adverse to head collars or brachycephalic dogs (dogs with "pushed in" faces).



*"No matter what training collar you decide is best for you and your dog, it is very important that the collar be utilized correctly."*

dogs. Often the punishment these collars deliver will result in only a temporary suppression of the unwanted behavior and defensive or pain-elicited aggression can be a common side effect.



#### **Electronic Collars -**

Otherwise known as shock collars or e-collars, these are electronic training aids developed to deliver an electrical signal, vibration, or tone through contact points attached to a dog collar. An electronic collar should never ever be used without consulting at least two dog training professionals first and foremost.

Most certified professional dog trainers and The Association of Professional Dog Trainers (APDT) support a Least Intrusive, Minimally Aversive (LIMA) approach to behavior modification and training. If your trainer is utilizing a collar or technique that makes you feel uneasy in any way, walk away and find another trainer!

No matter what training collar you decide is best for you and your dog, it is very important that the collar be utilized correctly. Training

collars are meant to be used only during training. Serious injury can result if training collars are left on too long, while a dog is playing, or unattended. Be a responsible dog owner by doing your research and educating yourself. If you are unsure, consult a professional. You can find a list of Certified



#### **Professional Dog**

Trainers in your area on the Certification Council for Professional Dog Trainers website, [www.ccpdt.org](http://www.ccpdt.org).

Finally, remember that training collars can be compared to training wheels on a bicycle. Ideally, the goal is to wean your dog off of all training collars. If you rely solely on a training collar and do not concentrate on teaching, communicating, and establishing a bond with your dog, you will end up depending on the training collar forever. Imagine if we never took the time to learn to ride bikes without training wheels. Silly, right? When your training reaches the point when your dog desires to be with you and do as you say, because he loves doing so and not because he is forced to do so, you have reached the Holy Grail of dog training.



**Slip Collar** - Also called a "choke chain," a slip collar is a length of chain or nylon rope with rings at either end such that the collar can be formed into a loop around the top of the dog's neck, just behind the ears. This collar tightens when the dog pulls or the handler "pops" the leash. Slip collars should never be left on a dog when not in use. Numerous dogs are strangled to death each year after being allowed to play with other dogs or left alone while wearing a slip collar. "Choke chains" are called choke chains because they actually choke the dog which can not only cause serious tracheal and esophageal damage, but can also result in increased aggression in some dogs.

**Prong Collar** - A prong collar is made of interlocking links, each with two blunt prongs that pinch the dog's skin when the collar

is tightened. It should fit snugly just below the dog's ears. Unlike the chain slip collar, it puts even pressure around the neck by pinching the skin in a band about a half inch wide. Also, unlike a slip collar, no



pressure is put directly on the trachea when a prong collar is used correctly. The decision to use a prong or slip collar should never be taken lightly and education and research is a must. These collars are never a good choice for puppies, aggressive, shy, or fearful