

## Selecting a Collar or Harness for a Dog

Our topics will be dog:

- Leashes
- Collars
- Harnesses

### **Snap Leashes and Retractable Leashes**

Snap leashes should be attached only to a choke collar, head collar, or chest harness.

Attachment to a fixed buckle collar is not secure restraint to prevent an escape since many dogs with back away while pulling on the collar and shaking their head.

Training leashes are four to six feet long. A retractable leash is a snap band or cord leash that is 10 to 26 feet long and can be spring wound similar to the action of a retractable measuring tape. Retractable leashes offer minimal control of dogs and should only be used in open spaces.

### **Collars**

#### ***Flat and Rolled (Fixed Buckle) Collars***

Flat fabric or flat or rolled leather collars with a buckle or plastic snap closure is used for identification purposes and routine restraint of puppies or sensitive small dogs. Collars should allow 2 fingers to be easily slipped underneath or the collar is too tight.

Leashes should not be attached to flat or rolled collars for reliable restraint. Even if the collar is properly fitted, the dog may be able to back up, shake its head, and escape.

#### ***Choke (Attention) Chain Collars***

Choke chain collars are similar to slip leashes. The term “choke” is a misnomer since the goal is not to choke the dog. A choke chain tightens quickly around the neck and releases quickly when tension is released on an attached leash. A more accurate name would have been an attention chain. Pulls should be to the side and not upwards which can cause excessive compression around the neck. For the handler to be on the right side of the dog’s body, the collar’s loop should go clockwise around the dog’s neck. If applied counter clockwise, the loop will not fully release when tension is removed on the attached leash.

Dogs must continually walk on the same, traditionally left, side of the handler. The chain will not be oriented correctly when on the other side of the handler. Choke collars should only be used for training purposes and when the dog is on a hand-held leash. Otherwise, there is risk of strangulation if tied or if the collar becomes caught on an object.

Choke collars, as with any restraint equipment, can be misused and cause aversive behaviors. Unlike shock collars, choke collars are training tools that can deliver attention-to-the-

handler getting signals appropriate to situations that may quickly vary. They are not intended to cause injury or pain. Used with proper discretion and timing, a choke collar can be a safe, useful communication tool between handlers and dogs and does not cause aversive behaviors.

### ***Martingale and Prong Collars***

Martingale collars are flat collars with rings at both ends and a chain that goes through each ring. The chain also has rings at each end. The size of the flat collar can be adjusted in size so that the extent of squeeze on the neck, when the leash is pulled, can be modified. Unlike choke collars, martingale collars cannot be put on backwards and will work the same if the dog changes from one side of the handler to the other. Since they are flat collars and the pressure delivered to the dog's neck from tension on the leash is less than a choke collar, martingale collars can be more easily ignored than choke collars by inattentive dogs.

Thick-haired dogs may have sufficient hair padding on their neck to ignore the pressure of a basic martingale collar. Blunted prongs can produce better responsiveness without causing injury.

Martingale collars are also called limited slip collars because they are less likely to slip off if the dog pulls back on the collar and leash. For this reason, they are often used on sight hounds, such as Afghans, which have narrow heads.

### **Chest Harness**

Chest harnesses cannot strangle dogs and will not slip off if the dog pulls backward on a leash. All dogs without advanced leash or voice command training taken outside a building or security enclosure and all dogs being transported by car should have a harness with attached leash on to prevent escape or strangulation if they escape. Vicious dogs may be more easily handled and tractable by wearing both a harness and a leash and collar that cannot be chewed in two (chain or heavy wire). Upon return of the dog to a cage, the harness is removed first and the leash and collar is removed during the dog's return to its cage.

If you have comments or you're interested in particular animal handling subjects, contact us at [CBC@BetterAnimalHandling.com](mailto:CBC@BetterAnimalHandling.com)

Now let's recap the key points to remember from today's episode:

- 1. So-called "choke" collars are not for choking dogs. They are for one to second squeezing of the neck to redirect a dog's attention to its handler.**
- 2. Choke or slip collars should never be used for exercising dogs or tying their leash to anything. They are for training and short-term prevention of escape.**
- 3. Chest harnesses are primarily for prevention of escape and control of dogs with respiratory difficulties.**

More information on animal handling can be found in my books, *Animal Handling and Physical Restraint*, *Concise Textbook of Small Animal Handling*, and *Concise Textbook of Large Animal Handling* all published by CRC Press and available on Amazon and from many other fine book supply sources.

Additional information is provided at: [www.betteranimalhandling.com](http://www.betteranimalhandling.com) . This website has more than 200 past podcasts with notes on handling of dogs, cats, other small mammals, birds, reptiles, horses, cattle, small ruminants, swine, and poultry.

Don't forget, serious injury or death can result from handling and restraining some animals. Safe and effective handling and restraint requires experience and continual practice. Acquisition of the needed skills should be under the supervision of an experienced animal handler.