

Leashes, Collars, and Harnesses for Dogs

Our topics for this week are:

- **Selecting and using a leash**
- **Types of dog collars**
- **Benefits of a chest harness**

When handling a dog other than the handler's personal pet, a slip leash is the most useful equipment. All dogs (and cats) in a veterinary clinic or boarding kennel should have a slip leash on when taken outside a cage or kennel. All dogs taken outside a building without a secondary barrier to escape (fence) should have a chest harness with an attached leash.

Leashes

Flat leashes with metal snaps to attach to metal rings on collars are in common use, in part, because the flat strap provides a surface for marketing words or figures from the seller. Snap on leashes and buckle, flat collars provide little restraint, easy escapes by motivated dogs, and are poor training tools. Snap leashes should be attached only to a slip chain training collar, head collar, or chest harness.

A slip leash is a rope, cord, or flat woven strap with a metal ring honda or tied honda knot used for routine handling of dogs. Flat, strap slip leashes should not be used due to their inability to maintain an open loop when being placed over the dog's head and neck.

A slip leash serves as a sliding collar and lead rope in one piece. It can be tightened when needed to gain the dog's attention and released to reward proper responses. It also provides greater security against escape than a fixed collar and snap leash.

The handler should not stand in front and extend his hands toward the dog to place a slip leash. This posture is intimidating to dogs.

Handlers traditionally stand or walk with the dog on the handler's left side. For the slip leash to loosen when desired properly the honda end of the leash should go clockwise around the dog's neck. This allows the neck loop to loosen when tension is released on the leash.

When dealing with fractious dogs, a string should be tied to the leash's honda. The slip leash can then be loosened by pulling on the string and removed without placing a hand near the dog's head.

Slip leashes should not be used on dogs with breathing problems. If an alternative does not exist, the loop should be placed around the neck with one front leg through it to prevent pressure on the trachea. Dogs should never be tied and left unattended with a slip leash.

Slip leashes should not be wrapped around the muzzle and held in place by the ends to form a temporary muzzle. The neck loop could be too tight when the loops around the muzzle

are made. Use of a slip leash as a muzzle can also create an aversion to any use of slip leashes on the dog.

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 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.

Slip chain training collars are similar to slip leashes. The term “choke” is a misnomer since the goal is not to choke the dog.

A training collar tightens quickly around the neck and releases quickly when tension is released on an attached leash. 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. When in doubt, place the collar on the left wrist and pull upward then release to see if the chain relaxes as it should.

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.

Training 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.

Slip chain training collars, as with any restraint equipment, can be misused and cause aversive behaviors. Unlike shock collars, slip chain collars are training tools that can deliver attention-to-the-handler signals appropriate to situations that may quickly vary. Used with proper discretion and timing, a slip chain training collar can be a safe, useful communication tool between handlers and dogs and does not cause aversive behaviors.

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 so that the extent of squeeze on the neck, when the leash is pulled, can be modified.

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.

Unlike slip chain 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 slip chain collar. Martingale collars can be more easily ignored than slip chain 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.

Chest Harness

Chest harnesses cannot strangle dogs or aggravate upper respiratory disorders. It 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 should have a harness with attached leash on to prevent escape.

Vicious dogs may be more easily handled and tractable by wearing both a harness and a collar with leash that cannot be chewed in two (chain or heavy wire).

Some chest harnesses have a front clip for a leash. A restraining pull from a leash to the front of a harness disengages the pulling power of a dog and may aid in discouraging pulling in the future. A front clip chest harness is less effective than a head halter, but easier to use and dogs adjust quicker to the chest harness than a head halter.

If you have comments or you're interested in particular animal handling subjects contact us at CBC@BetterAnimalHandling.com

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

- 1. Slip leashes are a simple sliding collar and leash in one and essential for brief handling dogs without respiratory diseases.**
- 2. Buckled collars need to be adjusted frequently, at least weekly, in growing dogs.**
- 3. Chain or fabric slip collars are not intended to be used to choke dogs but a means of direct control and communication with a dog without pain or injury**
- 4. Slip training collars only work correctly from one side of the dog and are typically applied to work from the dog's right side.**

More information on animal handling can be found in my recent 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 . This website has more than 150 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.

