



## International Positive Dog Training Association Research Findings – Tools Head Halter

**Tool:** Head Halter; Gentle Leader®, Promise System™, Easy Way Collar™, Halti® Brand head halter

**Rating:** Acceptable when fitted properly and used following the criteria described in these research findings as long as the dog does not have an aversive reaction to it. Not acceptable when used for punishment or when used on stressed, anxious, fearful or aggressive dogs.

ACTT – Applied Canine Therapy and Training, Puppy Power and Canine Correspondence Studies do not recommend the use of head halters as they increase stress and anxiety in many dogs. Putting a head halter on a reactive dog is on par with putting a person in handcuffs then forcing them into what they perceive to be a dangerous or unpleasant situation. Instead we recommend the Balance, Sensible or Sensation Harness.



### Operant Sequence

The intended use of the head halter does not include an operant sequence as its purpose is for safety only, when attached to a leash or life-line and/or to control the movement of the nose, head and neck of an otherwise powerful dog or a dog that chokes when pulling on a collar. However, some dogs find the feel of the head halter and the pressure caused by tightening around the nose and/or neck unpleasant and/or frightening, in which case it becomes an aversive. When used as an aversive it works with the following quadrants of operant conditioning.



## **International Positive Dog Training Association**

### **Research Findings – Tools**

### **Head Halter**

#### **Positive Punishment**

- Pulling on the leash to cause tightening to the nose and/or neck and restriction of movement to decrease the likelihood that the behaviour will be repeated.

For example, adding tightening to stop the dog from pulling.

#### **Negative Reinforcement**

- Stopping the tightening to increase the likelihood that the behaviour will be repeated.

For example, loosening up on the pressure of the Halti in order to maintain heel position (avoidance conditioning).

**Use of Tool:** A safety device and/or an aversive.

#### **Proper Application:**

As a safety device, proper application includes a proper fit, positioning and securing the head halter. The Gentle Leader, Promise System and Halti are properly secured with the neck strap tight enough that you can fit one finger between the dog's neck and the collar, as snug as a neck tie. <sup>R1</sup> The nose strap should rest between the corners of the dog's mouth and the eyes and fastened into place with the adjustable clasp located under the dog's chin. If fitted properly the nose strap should not be able to reach the fleshy part of the dog's nose, nor ride up into the dog's eyes. <sup>R2</sup>

The Easy Way collar is properly secured with the Nape Loop fastened comfortably behind the dog's neck with the Nose Loop positioned comfortably around the muzzle between the nose and eyes, so that the Nose Loop cannot be pulled over the nose. <sup>R8</sup>

When the dog pulls on leash the Gentle Leader, Promise System and Halti will tighten around the dog's nose and neck as well as pull the dog's head toward the handler. Proper procedure includes gently drawing the dog into position then immediately loosening the leash.



## **International Positive Dog Training Association**

### **Research Findings – Tools**

### **Head Halter**

The Easy Way collar works with the dog's balance. Since the leash is attached to a ring behind the dog's head pulling on the leash throws the dog off balance, forcing it to relax into a loose leash.

#### **Parameters**

- The leash must remain loose in between corrections for the dog to realize which behaviour will predict the correction and which behaviour will prevent it.
- The dog must be taught the desired behaviour before being corrected for the undesirable behaviour.

#### **Benefits**

- The head halter “has a calming effect on some dogs.” R3
- Since the head halter has limited constriction there is a lower risk for abuse than those tools that have unlimited constriction.
- Some dogs adjust to this device quickly and find it comfortable.
- Much like the use of a head halter on a horse, the head halter controls the dog's strength by controlling the movements of the dog's head.
- Unlike a collar, the head halter does not constrict the dog's airway.
- By controlling the movement of the dog's nose, bites can sometimes be avoided.
- The head halter can provide light touch control over otherwise powerful dogs.
- The head halter can make it easier to maintain the dog's attention.
- The head halter can provide those with limited strength such as; children, seniors and the disabled the ability to control otherwise powerful dogs.



## **International Positive Dog Training Association Research Findings – Tools Head Halter**

- The Easy Way collar has a fleece-lined Nose Loop that allows for additional comfort because it will not rub or ride up on the dog's face. R9
- Since the leash is attached to the Easy Way collar behind the dog's head as opposed to under the chin, it eliminates the possibility of choking and twisting of the head and neck. R10
- The Easy Way collar has an additional strap and clasp that can be attached to the dead ring on a flat collar for additional safety by way of preventing escape should the Easy Way collar come off. R11

### **Drawbacks, Risks and Warnings**

#### **Physical**

- There is a high risk of escape if the head halter is fitted too loosely.
- The Halti brand head halter does not have an adjustable clip under the chin. Because of this it is difficult to get a proper fit, the nose strap is more likely to be pulled over the nose and/or push up and into the eyes also increasing the risk for escape.
- The head halter can cause pain and/or discomfort if fitted too tightly.
- The head halter can cause chaffing above the dog's nose and behind the head.
- The dog can injure itself if it attempts to remove the head halter with its paws or by rubbing its face on the ground.
- Some dogs are highly resistant to the head halter causing distrust in the handler, fear, avoidance behaviors, escape attempts and/or aggression.
- Some dogs are traumatized by the head halter.
- Some dogs never adjust to the head halter.



## **International Positive Dog Training Association Research Findings – Tools Head Halter**

- Harsh corrections have been blamed for causing distrust in the handler, fear, avoidance behaviors, escape attempts, aggression and/or spinal damage.
- If the collar is pulled for an extended period of time it can cause pain and/or discomfort.
- If the head halter is left on when a dog is unsupervised, it can become snagged causing pain and/or injury.
- Since proper use is different from the use of a collar the risk for misuse or abuse is high.
- Since proper use requires good timing and reflexes, coordination, awareness and sensitivity, there is a risk for abusive application.
- Some head halters have been known to cause irritation, wounds and infection.
- If the head halter is left on while two dogs are playing together, a dog's jaw or paw or nail can become caught in the other dog's head halter causing injury to one or both dogs.
- If the dog hits the end of the leash, life line or retractable leash with any force it can cause injury including, but not limited to, spinal injury.
- A dog in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada was reported to have been killed when a severe correction with a head halter broke its neck.
- If positioned too close to the eyes, the head halter push into the eyes causing pain and/or discomfort and/or injury to the eye including blindness.
- The head halter may be difficult to fit on dogs with a short nose.
- The head halter may be dangerous when used on dogs with “inherent breathing difficulties.” R4



## **International Positive Dog Training Association**

### **Research Findings – Tools**

### **Head Halter**

- The head halter may be dangerous when used on dogs with “cervical damage.”  
R5
- Dogs with short coats are more prone to irritation on the sensitive skin on top of the muzzle. R7

#### Behavioural

- Improper use of the head halter has been known to cause fear, submission, aggression, stress, depression and avoidance behaviours.
- Improper use of the head halter is seldom effective in changing unwanted behaviour.
- The anxiety caused by improper use or severe corrections can increase aggressive behaviour, the severity and frequency of aggressive episodes.
- Dogs prone to aggressive behaviour may become aggressive when the halter is put on. R6

#### Psychological

- Unwanted associations may be created if the dog pairs up the unpleasant experience of the correction with someone or something in the environment at the moment it is corrected. For example, if the dog is focused on a child when corrected, it may create an unpleasant association with children. This association can cause fear of children which could lead to fear aggression.
- The unpleasant experience can create fear and distrust of the handler.
- The unpleasant experience can create fear and distrust of anyone or anything in the environment.
- The unpleasant experience can cause stress, anxiety, and/or depression, leading to other behavior issues and/or the inability to learn.



## **International Positive Dog Training Association**

### **Research Findings – Tools**

### **Head Halter**

#### **Limitations**

- A desensitization program is often necessary to help the dog habituate to this piece of equipment.
- Excellent timing and reflexes, coordination, awareness and sensitivity are essential to proper application of a head halter correction.
- Since human behaviour is often affected by emotions, there is a risk of bad judgment, and/or timing on part of the handler.
- This tool can only be effective once the dog understands the desired response.
- The head halter is only effective if fitted and used properly.
- If the head halter is too tight it can cause non-stop pain and/or discomfort.

#### **References**

- R1 - Promise, The Natural Behavior Management System, Dr. Robert K. Anderson and Ruth E. Foster, Professional Animal Behavior Associates 1989, Page19
- R2 - Promise, The Natural Behavior Management System, Dr. Robert K. Anderson and Ruth E. Foster, Professional Animal Behavior Associates 1989, Page20
- R3 - Professional Standards for Dog Trainers, Delta Society 2001, Page 19
- R4 - Guide to Humane Dog Training, American Humane Association 1998-2001 Page 26
- R5 - Guide to Humane Dog Training, American Humane Association 1998-2001 Page 26
- R6 - Guide to Humane Dog Training, American Humane Association 1998-2001 Page 26
- R7 - Guide to Humane Dog Training, American Humane Association 1998-2001 Page 266
- R8 - New Trix Instruction Sheet and website at [www.newtrix.ca](http://www.newtrix.ca)
- R9 - New Trix Instruction Sheet and website at [www.newtrix.ca](http://www.newtrix.ca)
- R10 - New Trix Instruction Sheet and website at [www.newtrix.ca](http://www.newtrix.ca)
- R11 - New Trix Instruction Sheet and website at [www.newtrix.ca](http://www.newtrix.ca)