



Are You the *Pain* in Your Dog's Neck?

If you are controlling your dog with a neck collar, your answer is fated to be yes. It is out of your control for it not to be, even with the best of intentions. It doesn't even have to be one of those barbaric training collars designed to inflict pain for you to be causing pain.¹

Think about it; the primary processes of the body that sustain life must pass through the neck. These complex processes include the muscular, circulatory, digestive, endocrine, respiratory, and nervous systems. The neck is the pathway through which the brain and body speak with each other. The important clinical structures are the thyroid, larynx, trachea, esophagus, and cervical vertebrae.² If the neck is damaged, the entire being is harmed.

Dogs controlled by their necks from puppyhood onward suffer a wide range of health issues that lead to untold suffering. For decades, pet owners have been advised to asphyxiate and electrocute their dogs with choke, prong, and shock collars, without comprehending the actual damage and suffering they are causing. In the scientific report, "Influence of Early Life Adversity and Breed on Aggression and Fear in dogs" it is stated that negative experiences that puppies face in the first six months of life, such as abuse and relinquishment, leads to heightened aggression and fearfulness in adulthood.³

A dog's instinct is to follow their nose. Sniffing to take in the world around them is the essence of being a dog. Rather than helping them to satisfy this instinctual pursuit, we frequently drag them away while they are engaged in investigating some captivating scent. It is our instinct to pull the dog toward us so we can continue walking, and it's just as instinctual for the dog to resist. Any pull, yank, jerk, snap, twist, choke, or jolt to bring our dogs to heel will leave a nasty impression, literally and figuratively. Yet, this information is not reaching enough dog parents, particularly those new to living with dogs.

Prong collars, a.k.a. pinch collars, are nasty pain delivery systems. Metal or plastic prongs project from inside of the collar band so that when pulled, the prongs dig into the dog's neck. A single tug is all it takes to hurt a dog. When a handler exerts their full weight and energy into giving a dog a forceful and sudden unexpected jerk, the prongs can puncture the skin, leaving bruises, holes, and bleeding, along with a significant risk of infection. As harmful as this is, the external effects are trivial compared to how severe the internal damage may be.⁴

Chain collars, a.k.a. choke collars when tightened around a dog's neck are comparable to being manually strangled.⁵ Strangling a dog with one's bare hands is considered criminal; yet, hypocritically, it is permissible to do so with a dog collar. Pressure applied to the neck, whether from the dog pulling or the person pulling, or by being suspended off the ground with a collar and leash — sadly a typical practice among aversive trainers — can result in serious injuries and even death.^{6, 7}

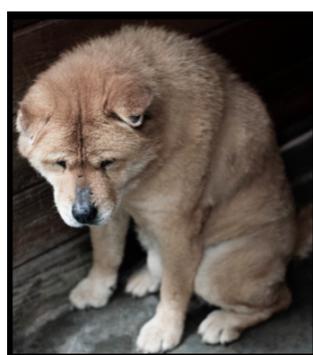


No pressure on the neck is low enough to avoid risk.
Photo Credit: Ben Mooreland

Keeping the chain tightened will restrict blood flow to the brain. Dizziness and confusion are symptoms of this, along with the damage and destruction of brain cells. Suffocation causes blood vessel tears, clots, hoarseness, and swallowing problems. Ongoing pressure affects the eyes, bones, nerves, trachea, esophagus, thyroid gland and vertebrae. No pressure is low enough to eliminate risk.⁸

The shock collar is a popular device among balanced /aversive trainers because most of them are lost without one. It is a weapon that they choose to use to punish dogs. By inflicting pain and fear through the delivery of electric shocks, they can crush a dog's joy, autonomy, genuine personality, and instinctive behaviours. The physical harm involved includes muscle spasms, nerve damage, breathing problems, swallowing problems, heart palpitations, tissue burns, and infection; whereas the emotional trauma destroys any sense of trust or safety the animal may have been blessed with prior to being electrically shocked. Research indicates these collars do not deter disobedience, nor do they improve learning outcomes. It is undeniably clear, reward based training is far more effective and humane.⁹

Standard flat collars and head halters promoted as gentle and humane are far less harmless than they are made out to be. Attempting to manage a dog who is excited, frightened, reluctant, or a chronic puller by manipulating their head and neck to and fro, from side to side, up and down, while the straps chafe the sensitive snout and irritate the area just below the eyes is a formula for major trouble. If a neck injury goes undiagnosed and untreated, as often happens with dogs, their suffering may never be alleviated. It is not unusual to see a dog resigned to wearing a head halter, showing little interest in his surroundings with his head lowered, or attempting to remove the halter by scraping his face on the ground. It's obvious dogs hate halters, and therefore, so should you.



A lowered body position can reflect a dog in pain. Photo Credit: Amanda Valverde

Aversive/balanced trainers know the damage that neck collars inflict but are invested in telling dog parents a very different story. They hear the whimpers and cries of the dogs they train, see the rashes and holes left in the necks of dogs from the abusive application of shock collars but continue to use and defend them.¹⁰ It is reasonable to assume that they must derive some satisfaction or release their own pent

up anger by instilling fear and pain on more powerless beings. It is rewarding for them, and its doubly rewarding when they receive payment for doing it.

Not enough people whose dogs are hurt by trainers report the incidents to authorities. It is a serious offence to cause an animal unnecessary pain and suffering, and unless people report abuse, it can't be stopped. Why choose to live with dogs, or become a dog trainer, if you have to use violence to make an animal's presence tolerable? Some people claim to love dogs, but I will put it forward that they may love the idea of dogs and what they do for them, but they don't love dogs. Google dog collar damage images and see for yourself.



Family dog suffered burn injuries and holes punctured in his neck during training sessions at a 'Sit Means Sit' dog training franchise. Photo credit: [KYNV 13](#)

Manipulating a lively dog with neck collars of any kind without regular bodily checks to identify external injuries can leave wounds undetected for some time, particularly on dogs with dense, long coats or those infrequently groomed, massaged, or petted. People must truly know their animals well to recognize subtle changes that may be indicators of pain.¹¹ Dogs may look fine but feel bad. They may begin to show fear simply by anticipating further pain. They can be suffering yet still show signs of happiness. Too often, we chalk things up to aging and just slowing down, but any subtle changes that last for more than a day should be investigated. Identifying internal damage requires not just regular vet check-ups, but also advanced imaging tests as well. Even then, some damage will still remain undetectable until identified during a necropsy.

The only way to ensure that these training collars do not cause our animals harm is to leave them on store shelves. Harnesses are recommended for spirited, energetic, strong, and pulling dogs. Correction: for any dog even couch potatoes. Based on current scientific evidence, the AVSAB recommends that only reward-based training methods be used for all dog training, including the treatment of behavior problems.¹²



Photo credit: Max Bender

We will make mistakes because we are human. Dogs will forgive us because that is who they are. The difficulty will lie in whether we can forgive ourselves. Caring for our own emotional well being is important too. Those who experience remorse do so because they really do care. Making mistakes is easy; trying to cope with remorse is not. Guilt and regret are brutal emotions, best avoided if possible. Let's not be the pain in our dog's necks. Let's be the joy in their hearts; nix the collars, and go with the harness.

G. Williams,
Promoting the exclusive use of pain-free training'

Resources

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6. [Postmortem radiological imaging and autopsy of a manually strangled dog with a neck twist](#), Kreangsak Prihirunkit, Forensic Imaging, Vol. 31, 2022
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[Did you ever think about what happens under the collar?](#)