

Which Collar is Best?

By Brenda Howard

You have just adopted a new family member from the local shelter. Good for you! Now you must make a few decisions about what type of collar to use. The type of collar you use may depend on what type of dog you have, and your intended activity.

Martingale Collars

I happen to own a breed of dog that has extremely loose skin on its neck and head. From years of experience I know that a buckle collar (also known as a static collar) can be a problem for breeds with loose skin because the dog can back out of the collar no matter how snugly it is fitted to the neck. This is clearly a problem! With breeds that have loose skin such as Bloodhounds, and Basset Hounds a collar that tightens up with pressure is a safer choice. One type of collar that will snug up under pressure is called a Martingale - it is similar to a horse's martingale. Martingale style collars are constructed from two loops - the larger loop fits over the dog's head encircling the neck and the smaller loop is attached to the large loop. The smaller loop is what the leash is clipped to. The collar should loosely fit the dog's neck and then snug up to prevent the collar from going over the ears and off with pressure. This collar style is also great for dogs with narrow back skulls such as Whippets and Greyhounds.

Slip Collars

A slip collar - also referred to as a choke collar - is a collar used for training. This type of collar can be made from nylon rope, chain, or flat woven material. The collar will have a ring on each end of the material. The collar creates a loop that will go over the dog's head and onto the neck by feeding one end of the collar into the loop of the other end. Correctly used, this collar will NEVER choke the dog, but will prevent the dog from backing out of the collar in the same way a Martingale collar works. A slip style collar has no safety built into it because it will continue to tighten the more pressure is applied to it. This style of collar should only be used when walking a dog, or training. It should never be left on a dog as it does pose a risk for choking.

Prong collars

A prong style collar - also commonly called a German choke collar - is designed as a modified martingale /chain collar. A prong collar has "teeth" or prongs that will bite into the neck of the dog as pressure is applied by pulling on a leash attached to the main ring. This collar is not favored by most trainers for most dogs as it is perceived to be an unnecessarily strong aversive. The concept is that the pinch collar used in training mimics the natural training that takes place in a litter of pups - the mother dog will often pinch a pup in the neck in order to get the pup to behave. The debate about this collar centers around the fact that in nature a mother dog used the neck grab very seldom - it is one of her methods used primarily for very high offense behavior by her pups. Most dogs will learn to ignore the pinch if the collar is used incorrectly leaving you with a dog that still pulls on the collar and is being pinched without effect. Pinch collars should only be used during training (hopefully with the instruction of a good dog trainer). A pinch collar should never be left on a dog

when not in use.

Buckle or Static collars

Buckle collars are fine for many dogs and many breeds of dogs. They can be used to carry identification such as owner information and veterinarian and rabies inoculation information. Buckle collars can make quite a fashion statement since there are a vast range of colors and patterns and materials to choose from. Some buckle collars have plastic fasteners that are fast and easy to operate and some have actual buckles! Many buckle collars are adjustable which is great for growing puppies. Dogs can be trained on this style of collar as long as the dog can't back out of the collar! Buckle collars can be chewed off during play with other dogs so, even though it is relatively safe to leave them on when not working with your dog, be aware that Buckle collars can be chewed off during play with other dogs.

Head Halter Collar

A collar style popular among dog trainers is the head halter style. There are a number of different manufactures of head collars and they vary slightly from each other - basically the collar is designed to encircle the dog's muzzle, which gives the handler a greater degree of control over the dog's head and therefore the dog. The same principle applies to horses! Most head halter style collars are adjustable so they can grow with your young dog or puppy. This is a wonderful collar for dogs that are stubborn pullers and possess very high energy levels. The head halter collar should be fitted correctly to the dog following the manufactures instructions. Dogs can eat, drink, bark, and yes, still bite with a head halter collar on - it's not a muzzle, it's a collar! This collar is to be used during training only and should be removed when you are not working with your dog.

Whichever collar you use, give your dog a bit of time to become used to the feel of the collar before you try to work with your dog. Most dogs will need an opportunity to adapt to the feel of a collar if they have never had one on before. Proper fit and use of a collar can help you and your dog get where you want to go!

Brenda Howard has been training dogs for over 20 years and is a member of The Association of Pet Dog Trainers, The American Bloodhound Club, The Basset Hound Club of America and The Pet Care Services Association (formerly the ABKA).

The information presented here is not intended to substitute for the advice and care of a veterinarian. Please consult your veterinarian regarding all issues relating to your dog's health.

