



HEAD HALTER

USING THIS LEASH WALKING TOOL KINDLY

A head halter can be a helpful leash walking tool for some dogs, especially large breeds. One of the downsides of to this tool is the discomfort and annoyance that dogs often express while wearing it. This handout is all about creating a positive wearing experience for your dog if you decide this tool is the best for you and your dog's leash walking routine.

FINDING THE RIGHT EQUIPMENT

Features that we look for in a head halter:

- Padded nose strap (added comfort for the dog)
- Secondary connection to your dog's collar

[Click here to check out the Halti Head Halter on Amazon.](#)

Our Favorite

- **Halti** – padded nose strap, extra connection to collar, straps connecting nose piece to neck piece to minimize (although not eliminate) the risk of the dog being able to slip the nose strap off his nose.

WAIT! BEFORE YOU STRAP IT ON . . .

- A key part of the usefulness of a head halter is that your dog is comfortable and relaxed while wearing it.
- Before putting your head halter on your dog for the first time, we must condition your dog to accept wearing it, through a combination of classical and operant conditioning.



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HEAD HALTER CONDITIONING - START WITH CLASSICAL

- **Classical Conditioning:** Simply put for our purposes, this is pairing a neutral stimulus (in this case, the head halter), with a positive outcome (really yummy treats!), so that the neutral stimulus starts to elicit the same positive feelings that the positive outcome elicits. Think of Pavlov's dogs and how they started salivating when they just heard the bell, even when there was no food present. We want your dog to have those same excited feelings about the muzzle!
- **Head Halter in Your Hand:** Your dog doesn't need to do anything for this game except perceive (watch/notice) the presentation of the head halter. Set up with your dog in front of you, the halter in one hand, and really yummy treats in the other. Move the halter out in front of you, and immediately reward your dog. Reset the halter and treats back to "neutral" at your body. Repeat. If your dog is moving away from the halter or acting nervous/anxious, position the halter a little farther away as you present it. Repeat until your dog is anticipating a treat after the presentation of the halter.
- **Head Halter as a Food Bowl:** After your dog is comfortable looking at the halter, the next step is to get him expecting great things from the inside of the muzzle! One of our favorite ways to do this is to feed meals through the halter. Hold the halter in your hand, and place kibble in the palm of your other hand. Stick that food hand through the hole of the halter and let your dog eat the kibble out of your hand. At this point don't rush to placing the head halter over your dog's nose - just let him eat the food out of your hand while it's stationary.





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HEAD HALTER CONDITIONING - MOVE ON TO OPERANT

- **Operant Conditioning:** Behavior controls consequences! For our purposes here, this is where we start to wait for specific behaviors from our dogs (in regards to the head halter) for each reward.
- **Shape the Halter:** Set up with your dog in front of you, the halter in one hand, and really yummy treats in the other. If you use a clicker, put that in your hand with your treats (or place the treats in a bowl nearby). Present the halter to your dog, stopping a few inches from his nose. If your dog has been eating out of the halter already, he might offer to put his nose inside to check for treats. As soon as you get movement towards the halter opening, click (or use a verbal marker) and place your treat in the end of the halter. Repeat, increasing your criteria gradually, until your dog is eagerly placing his nose into the halter to prompt a click/treat.
- **Add Duration:** Once you are getting a great nose-into-halter behavior, you are ready to start adding duration. Instead of clicking/treating as soon as your dog puts his nose inside the halter, pause for 1-2 seconds. Click for duration, and again place the treat in the end of the halter. Repeat, increasing number of seconds in duration before each click/treat as your dog is ready.
- **Add Fastening:** Once you have a solid foundation of duration (30-60 seconds), you can start adding the "distraction" of messing with the straps of the halter while your dog's nose is in it. Don't rush this step. We don't want to frighten your dog by suddenly being trapped, so take it slow! Move the straps around behind your dog's ears, click/treat. Fasten and then immediately unfasten, click treat.



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HALTER CONDITIONING - ADD ACTIVITIES & DISTRACTIONS

- Once you have a shaped halter behavior with duration and fastening steps, you are ready to take your halter skill on the move! These are some examples of Easy, Medium, and Hard levels, but for your dog's unique situations try to identify other ways that you can break down your goal halter situation (like a walk outside) into these three levels.
- **Easy:** Start with easy movements and activities. Once the halter is on and fastened, ask your dog to follow you two steps away and immediately reward.

Continue moving around and engaging your dog's attention in following you, rewarding liberally. Take the halter off before your dog gets frustrated with it and tries to remove it himself.

- **Medium:** Once your dog is comfortable moving around in the house while wearing the halter, take him outside (in safe environment with very few triggers) and play simple leash walking games, rewarding consistently for good behavior while wearing the halter.
- **Hard:** Add exposure to more arousing triggers, like other dogs and people - at a distance at first, but closer as your dog is comfortable. This is just for the halter conditioning aspect - at this point you shouldn't be going closer to triggers than you would without a halter.

