

Choke and Prong Collars



Choke and prong collars are still extremely popular with many dog owners. They are generally made of metal chain material which tightens around a dog's neck when the handler pulls or jerks back on the leash. Aversive trainers will often use choke and prong collars to perform 'corrections', essentially causing the dog pain any time he pulls on the leash or misbehaves.

While this type of training may stop the pulling or suppress a certain behavior at that particular moment, it does nothing to address the root of the dog's issue. Leash corrections that are given on these collars exacerbate behavioral issues such as fear and aggression.

Bottom Line:

Choke, pinch and prong collars should be avoided in all cases.

Are choke collars safe?

Even if used without corrections, choke collars can still cause pain, discomfort, and injury to a dog's neck, head and spinal cord.

- If you feel your dog's neck with your hands followed by your own neck, you will see how similar they are.
- The trachea, esophagus, thyroid gland, lymph nodes, jugular vein, muscles and spinal column are all located in similar places.
- The only difference between a dog and a human neck is that under the fur, a dog's skin layer is only 3-5 cells thick, while the top layer of human skin is denser, 10-15 cells thick.

What kind of injuries do choke collars cause?

The thyroid gland lies at the base of the neck just below the larynx close to where any collar sits. Just one yank can cause injury to a gland that controls many of the body's vital functions.

- Studies show that the gland gets severely traumatized whenever a dog pulls on the leash and becomes inflamed.
- When this happens it is 'destroyed' by the body's own immune system which tries to remove the inflamed thyroid cells.
- The destruction of these cells leads to hypothyroidism, which causes loss of energy, weight gain, skin problems, hair loss, ear infections and organ failure.

Choke collars also affect other areas of the body including the eyes.

- Another study reveals that when force is applied to the neck via a leash and a choke collar, pressure in the eyes is significantly increased.
- This type of pressure can cause serious injury to dogs already suffering thin corneas, glaucoma, or eye injuries.

- The same study was done with dogs that were wearing harnesses, which had no impact on eye pressure when force was applied.

How do prong collars work?

Prong collars function similarly to choke collars, except they contain metal spikes on the inside that dig into and 'pinch' a dog's neck if he pulls on the leash. Prong collar advocates believe that the 'pinch' action mimics the teeth of a mother dog grabbing a puppy's neck during a correction.

There is no scientific evidence to back up this claim however, and it's unlikely that dogs make a connection between the pinch of a collar and a correction given by a mother's mouth, especially as no canine 'mother' is physically present.

Why should prong collars be avoided?

Dogs walked on prongs are also constantly subjected to pain and discomfort, which creates fear, anxiety and aggression on walks. Dogs that are already reactive on leash can become even more reactive due to frustration from collar discomfort.

- A 1992 study of 400 dogs concluded that pulling and jerking on the leash (with any collar) is harmful to a dog's neck and throat.¹
- One of the clearest correlations was between cervical (neck) damages and 'jerk and pull'.
- 91% of the dogs who had neck injuries had also been exposed to jerking on the lead by the owner or been allowed to pull hard on the lead for long periods of time.

If these collars cause pain, why does my dog still pull?

Dogs cannot tell us when they are in pain. They put up with near strangulation because the drive to pull forward overrides the pain at that moment, but the after effects are serious and long lasting.

Are choke and prong collars humane if used properly?

Even though it is proven that choke and prong collars contribute to neck, back, and spinal injuries as well as other issues in dogs, there are many who still believe that if used correctly, these collars are humane and effective tools that cause no pain or harm.

- Depending on what your personal definition of humane is, it is hard to argue that if something has the potential to cause such damage it should not be considered humane or safe.
- Any device that constricts around a neck, be it the neck of a human or canine, is dangerous and has the potential to do real harm.
- Try applying a small amount of pressure to your neck and experience what a dog goes through when force is applied to any collar.

What other options do I have to stop my dog pulling?

There are more effective and humane alternatives to using a choke or prong collar on your dog.

- Find a great positive trainer to help you teach your dog to walk on a loose leash.
- Even large, strong dogs can be walked without the use of a choke or prong collar.
- Consider a regular harness or a chest-led, no-pull harness, front clip harness to stop pulling without causing your dog pain or fear.

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