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## Is Your Dog's Collar Dangerous?

A traditional dog trainer would say that you should teach a dog who pulls on leash not to pull by walking him on a choke chain collar and yanking it abruptly whenever he starts to pull.

Some trainers would suggest that the choke chain is a harmless training tool. They are misinformed to say the least. The whiplash effect of the choke chain can set the stage for disc disease, neuropathy, or disease of the spinal cord and nervous system. Choke chains cause injuries more often than not. These collars injure thousands of dogs each year. Much of the damage from choke chains is cumulative. When you think about the amount of force that can be applied to a dog's neck with a choke chain and the leverage of a leash it's no surprise that these all too common training tools are dangerous and sometimes lethal.

The garroting effect of a choke chain can cause bruising and damage to the skin and tissues in the neck, resulting in the formation of scar tissue. Scar tissue has no feeling, thus subsequent jerks will require greater force to achieve an effect. Chokers can cause dogs to become fearful of hands, resentful, and aggressive. A choke chain left on an unsupervised dog is a potential death sentence as well--the dog can get caught on something and hang themselves.

One of the gentlest devices for training dogs, including very powerful and active dogs, not to lunge is a head halter. These consist of a strap that fits around the back of the dog's neck, connects to a loop over the dog's muzzle and continues down to a control ring under the chin. The idea is that where dogs' heads go, their bodies follow. The halter works, not through force, but by redirecting the dog's focus sideways or down. It may also re-create the sensation felt by puppies when their mothers correct them by putting their mouths over their puppies' muzzles.

Any training tool can be dangerous in the wrong hands. Technique is everything. A heavy-handed approach is counterproductive, it causes fear and stress which impairs learning, although with force-based training if you don't stop the behavior with the first yank of the choker, then you'll have to engage in an ever-escalating ordeal with your dog. Fortunately a dog can be taught to heel just by using positive reinforcement, such as lure rewards (urging the dog to stay close by holding a treat or toy, for example).

Some injuries caused by choke collars:

- Dislocation and/or fracture of the vertebrae
- In vertebral disc protrusion
- Fainting
- Partial or complex paralysis of the hind and/or forelimbs due to spinal cord injuries
- Damage to the vagus nerve affecting function of major organs such as the heart, lungs, liver, bladder, spleen, kidneys, etc.
- Crushing of the trachea with partial or complete asphyxiation
- Crushing of and sometimes fracture of the bones in the larynx
- Bruising of the esophagus
- Sharp increases in pressure in the head, which can cause brain or eye damage and sometimes prolapse of the eye.