

Different dogs need different gear

By Lisa Bloch

There are a variety of collars, leashes, and training tools out there for your dog. How to know what's best? The answer mostly depends on your dog.

But first, a few definite no-nos. Never use shock collars. These collars are so harmful that several countries have banned their use. This past spring, England joined Denmark, Germany, and Sweden, among others, in recognizing the harm they cause and outlawing their use. According to the Guardian, "There is wide-ranging evidence demonstrating the detrimental effect that these can have on the welfare of dogs."

When Petco stopped selling them last year, they wrote on their website that "dogs respond effectively to positive, voluntary and rewards-based training, while shock collars have been shown to increase fear, anxiety and stress levels."

Here are some others we don't recommend for any dog:

- **Retractable leashes.** A retractable leash is a long, cable-like leash that's housed inside a plastic case and extends when pulled. Dogs have to pull on the leash to get where they want to go. The dog learns that if they pull, they can go wherever they want. Not a great lesson. There are also serious safety concerns. The cable can easily become entangled when one dog encounters another and, even worse, it can cause burns if it gets wrapped around your leg.

- **Prong or pinch collars.** These collars can cause pain and exacerbate behavior issues like fear and aggression. Dogs already reactive on leash can become even more reactive from the pain, and they can cause serious injury to your dog. 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.

Now on to the good:

- **Walking leash.** If your dog is well-behaved on a leash, this is for you. We recommend a 6-foot leash as it allows you to maintain a loose leash in many situations. They're often made of nylon or leather and attach to a ring in the collar.

- **Back clip harness.** This harness goes around the dog's chest with a ring at the top of the dog's back. They're especially useful for small dogs with delicate throats that

can be easily damaged by collars. Also, there's the "cute factor," since they come in all kinds of patterns.

- **Front clip harness.** This type of harness has a ring in the front and another on the back. A special leash with clips on both ends minimizes pulling without putting pressure on the dog's neck. When the dog pulls, pressure is distributed across the body, and the dog is turned toward the walker.

- **Head halters.** These are similar to horse halters and great for dogs that require more control. They fit over the dog's snout, slightly resembling a muzzle (though they don't protect against biting). The idea is that where their head goes, their body follows, so if you can move their head, you'll control their body. If a dog wearing a halter forges ahead of you, the tension on the leash causes their head to turn and make them look at you. With their head turned the dog must wait until you catch up so the tension is released and walking can be resumed. Do this in moderation, though, since jerking a dog's head too hard can be harmful. It might also be uncomfortable at first, so give your dog time to get used to wearing it. We recommend trying the front clip harness before using this tool.

Still confused? Check out the behavior and training handouts available at marinhumane.org/oh-behave.

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