A person and dog with leashes

Description automatically generated**Chapter 43: Head Collar (Halti)**

The Halti is a brand of head collar typically used at Guiding Eyes. A head collar fits high on the dog’s neck with a loop that goes around the muzzle. You may or may not receive this collar, depending on your needs as a team. Your instructor will help determine if the Halti will be helpful for you. The Halti provides safe and humane control and enables some handlers to more easily feel the movements of the dog’s head. We DO NOT use a typical snap and release correction when using the Halti, but rather steady pressure or a gentle pull and as always release when the dog complies.

**Familiarizing yourself with the Halti**

The Halti has many straps and may seem confusing at first. Take your time as your instructor helps you become familiar with the different parts of the collar and how it functions. Challenge yourself to practice by jumbling it up several times and making sure you can get it straightened out again.

Start with the small metal thumb clip. This clip is attached to the safety strap, and affixes to your dog’s working collar. Follow the safety strap up to a metal ring. The safety strap affixes to the ring with a slip knot. The other strap in this ring is the nose loop. The nose loop feeds up through a second metal ring, and then opens up to slide onto the dog’s muzzle. The top of the nose loop often has soft padding sewn on the underside. This can be helpful in identifying the nose loop.

With one hand on each side of the nose loop, slide your hands back along the cheek straps, to find the neck loop. The neck loop is short on the one side and long on the other, each ending with a plastic buckle which will fasten behind the dog's ears. The neck loop buckle will not fasten if inside out or twisted. Your instructor may use a stuffed dog model to help you understand how the head collar will fit and function on your dog.

**Fitting the Halti and making sure your dog is comfortable**

All dogs have worked with the Halti during training, but if it’s been a while, they may still need a little time to get accustomed to it again. It’s important to start slowly and continue positive repetitions with food reward to prevent the dog from building any negative associations with it.

Begin by gently placing the nose loop over the dog’s nose, praise your dog as you slide your hands back on the cheek straps to find the neck loop, and buckle it high on the neck behind the ears. Once it is fastened, praise and reward. The neck strap is adjustable and should be fitted snugly high on the dog’s neck, just behind the ears, as tight as a belt or watch. Next, attach the safety strap to your dog’s regular collar and clip the leash to the lowest ring on the Halti. Treat your dog again as they feel the weight of the leash pulling down a bit on their muzzle.

Now you’ll want to try heeling your dog a bit, keeping the leash slack as much as possible. If your dog is fussy, tries to paw at the head collar, or rubs his face on your leg, apply gentle pressure upward on the leash as you ask your dog to “Sit”. Release all tension when your dog complies and offer food reward. Continue walking a few steps and asking for different behaviors until you feel your dog is responding well without fussing. Reward your dog whenever she is calm with the Halti. Use praise, food reward, and physical praise, whatever works best for your dog.

To remove the halti, simply reverse the steps. Start by moving the leash to your dog’s regular working collar, then unfasten the safety strap and unclip the neck loop. Be sure to wait until your dog is not fussing to take the Halti off.

**Working your dog with the Halti on**

There are a few adjustments you will need to make when using the Halti while working your dog in harness. When the leash is clipped to the Halti, it clips under the dog’s chin, forward from the neck, and you’ll need to give the dog a bit more length in the leash than usual while working. Be sure there is plenty of slack in the leash. If you feel any tension, your dog's head is being pulled to one side which will affect the accuracy of his work.

DO NOT use the traditional snap and release correction when clipped to the Halti. This can cause injury. A correction with the Halti is simply gently pulling the leash to move the dog’s head, then release, and redirect the dog with a command for a different behavior. Light leash cues can be utilized, keeping in mind that the leash is attached directly to the dog’s face.

Many handlers choose to reserve use of the Halti for high distraction areas. While the dog can open his mouth nearly normally while wearing the head collar, it’s best to avoid using it for long periods of time or during extreme heat as it may limit their ability to effectively pant to cool themselves. Do not use the Halti while parking your dog or while they are eating or drinking.

\*NOTE\* A Halti may look like a muzzle to some people – it is not. A side note about muzzles and the public: While the law does not address muzzles specifically, and well behaved & groomed guide dogs are allowed public access by law, poorly behaved & unkempt dogs may be asked to leave the premises. According to the Department of Justice, asking someone to muzzle a well-behaved guide dog is in essence denying someone free access as defined by the ADA. Fear of said dog is not justification for requiring a muzzle for right of access. That being said, a Halti may look like a muzzle, and if you need to momentarily concede the point for access, a Halti can be used.

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