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CANINE: USING SURGICAL COLLARS - ELIZABETHAN AND TUBULAR COLLARS

What is a surgical collar and when are they used?

Sometimes it is necessary to use a special type of collar to prevent your pet from attacking a particular area e.g. a wound or bandage dressing. They take two forms: Elizabethan collars and tubular collars.

Tubular collars are only available for use with certain sizes of pet. They consist of a semi rigid neck device that works by casting the neck so the animal cannot turn round and reach the affected area. In some pets they are very effective at stopping it from turning and chewing at an area but in others they do not work at all. The fit and comfort are essential.



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Elizabethan collars (also known as Buster Collars) are large plastic cone shaped structures placed around the pet's neck and head. They extend forward so the wider base is level with the end of the animal's muzzle. Thus when the animal turns its head it cannot touch any area of its body with its muzzle. If your pet has had surgery on its ears these collars are often used because they also protect the head from being scratched by the paws.

Are there any special precautions I need to take care of, when I use one of these collars?

You should always check that the collar is comfortable and not causing any soreness by rubbing. It is also essential that your pet cannot slip the collar off. It may take your pet a little time to adjust to wearing the collar and it may initially struggle. Do not be alarmed by this but stay with him and try to encourage him to relax. You should try to avoid taking the collar off when your pet is struggling as this teaches it to struggle in order to get its way and to get it off. This will encourage your dog to continue struggling for longer when you try again.

With both types of collars it is easier to spook your pet, as senses are restricted to some degree. You should therefore make sure that anyone approaching your pet, talks to him as they do so to warn him of the approach.

If a tubular collar is used, your pet may be aware that it cannot turn its head and detect things quite so easily. It is not surprising therefore that they may appear a bit restless and unwilling to settle. This is because they find it easier to keep a watch on their environment if they are standing and able to turn their whole body towards any stimulation.

Elizabethan collars may have several effects on your pet's behaviour because the cone not only restricts the field of vision to the sides and above, but the shape of the cone amplifies any noise while eliminating the ability to locate its direction. It may take your pet a little time to adjust to this. In the mean time it may be a little jumpy. Anyone approaching your pet must be warned of this as a frightened dog may snap first and investigate later. Some dogs, in particular, may learn to use the rim of the collar to rub against the area supposedly being protected, you should watch for this and notify your veterinarian if you spot him doing this. A different sized collar may be required.

It is important to make sure that your dog can drink with the collar on. It is not normally necessary to take the collar off while your pet feeds. You may need to raise the bowl up or fix it to a platform though to allow him to do this more easily.

You should exercise your dog on the lead and with the collar on, unless instructed otherwise. It has been known for a dog with an Elizabethan collar on to go scavenging and get its head stuck in a plastic bag with fatal consequences.

You should never leave your dog unsupervised without the collar on. Remember it only takes a split second for the dog to damage the area being protected. Also it is easier for your dog to adapt to wearing the collar the whole time than to have to keep adjusting to it being on, then off and then on again.

Are there any other alternatives to these collars?

Your veterinarian will have chosen to use the collar after considering the alternatives like the use of a muzzle, sedatives or the application of foul tasting substances to the area to be protected. If you feel that the collar is not working or that one of these would be just as effective and preferable for your pet then you should not be afraid to discuss this with your veterinarian.

This client information sheet is based on material written by Debra Horwitz, DVM, Diplomate ACVB & Gary Landsberg, DVM, Diplomate ACVB

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