



## Helping Your Dog Adjust to Being A Conehead

At some point in your dogs' life, it may be necessary for him to wear an Elizabethan collar. Also known as an E-collar (not to be confused with an electric collar used in some training scenarios). The dreaded "lampshade" is often feared by both the owner and by the pet. E-collars are used to prevent your dog from biting, scratching, and damaging a part of their body that has either been injured, has had surgery, or has a specific condition that makes them want to keep digging at it.

There will be times that you will have advanced notice that your dog will have to wear an E-collar such as with a planned cataract surgery, and then there are those times of emergency that you'll have no advanced warning. So, the time to familiarize yourself and your dog with an E-collar is before they have to wear one.

E-collars have evolved into many varieties over the years, from opaque to clear or colored plastic to stuffed cloth "donuts". Depending on what type of protection your dog is needing, researching options with your vet ahead of time will enable you to find the most comfortable type of E-collar to best suit your dog's needs.



The most common protective E-collar is a cone made of clear plastic. It may fasten with velcro strips or tabs along one side. The small end, which fits against the neck of the dog, is padded for comfort, and may contain loops through which you can fit a collar & buckle it on for a proper and safe fit. This also enables you to fasten a leash easily, since dogs with E-collars are often placed on restricted activity for a while.

If you know ahead of time that your dog will have to wear an E-collar, you can work with him or her to help desensitize them to the E-collar and lessen the trauma and stress of suddenly being faced with wearing one. You should also plan to take them to the groomer before surgery so that they'll be clean and groomed so that you won't have to worry about grooming them for a while.

The first thing to do is pick up the E-collar that you and your vet decide on. If your E-collar is the type that a buckle collar goes through, buy a new collar and thread it through the E-collar so it's ready to wear and will fasten securely. This is a perfect opportunity to have a discussion about what is expected of you and your pet after surgery (how long they'll wear the collar, their restrictions, cleaning the wounds, eye drops, etc.) to ensure the best possible outcome any surgical procedure or injury. Be sure you are clear about your vet's instructions on crating your dog and confining or restricting them. And be sure that your vet is aware of all the animals, adults and children (especially the elderly or handicapped) living in your home that will be around your dog while he's wearing the E-collar.

You are going to work with your dog to help them accept the E-collar. Yes, you can do this! Allow yourself a couple of weeks before your dog's planned surgery.

**Training Your Dog Step 1; Getting Your Dog Acquainted with an E-Collar** You will begin by spending a few days merely acclimating your pet to the E-collar; you will NOT actually be putting it on him just yet – **do not rush this or put the E-collar on your dog yet – you must be patient to be successful.**

- Create a quiet place where you and your dog can focus on each other without any distractions.
- Begin by lining up a handful of small treats that your dog adores and is not allergic to; something small like Cheerios works well for this purpose.
- Have the E-collar in the room with you, out of any bag so you don't frighten your dog trying to get to it.
- Once a day, you will show your dog the E-collar
- When you show him the E-collar, give him a treat.
- Repeat this several times.



- Put the E-collar on the floor and walk away.
- Let the E-collar stay on the floor so that you can examine it at his convenience.
- Do this for two days.
- Pick up the E-collar occasionally and move it around, always leaving it on the ground. Put it near his bed, among his toys, next to the food bowl. Move it around in different rooms of the house, always leaving it where he can examine it.

**Training Your Dog Step 2; Touching Your Dog with the E-Collar**

- You have spent three days getting your dog acquainted with the E-collar without you touching him with it. He may have smelled it, licked it or ignored it, but you have not yet been the one to touch him with it. Today you will touch him with it.
- Create a quiet place where you and your dog can focus on each other without any distractions.
- Begin by lining up a handful of small treats that your dog adores and is not allergic to; something small like Cheerios works well for this purpose.
- Have the E-collar in the room with you, out of any bag so you don't frighten your dog trying to get to it.
- Call your dog to you and touch him with the E-collar. You can rub the E-collar along his back or sides. Each time you touch him with the E-collar, give him a treat.
- Repeat this several times, touching and treating.
- Then put the E-collar back on the ground and walk away, ignoring it.
- Do this for next two days
- Pick up the E-collar occasionally and move it around, always leaving it on the ground. Put it near his bed, among his toys, next to the food bowl. Move it around in different rooms of the house, always leaving it where he can examine it.

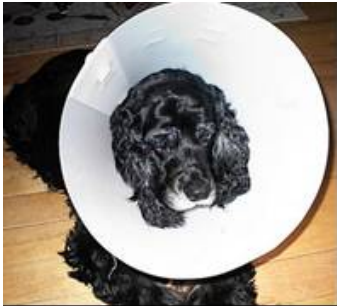
### **Training Your Dog Step 3: Putting the E-Collar on Your Dog without Fastening It**

- Ok, today's the big day. You've spent the last four days showing your dog his E-collar, letting him get acquainted with it at his own pace, and finally touching him with it. Today he will wear it for a minute without fastening it on. Don't worry, you'll both survive!
- Create a quiet place where you and your dog can focus on each other without any distractions.
- Bring out the heavy artillery, line up major treats — cheese or liver or meat or chicken, whatever your dog finds most irresistible.
- Have the E-collar in the room with you, out of any bag so you don't frighten your dog trying to get to it.
- Put the E-collar around his neck but DO NOT buckle it yet--just place it around his neck and give MAJOR TREATS AND PRAISE and IMMEDIATELY remove it.
- Put the E-collar down and walk away.
- Pick up the E-collar occasionally and move it around, always leaving it on the ground. Put it near his bed, among his toys, next to the food bowl. Move it around in different rooms of the house, always leaving it where he can examine it.
- Do this for the next 2 days.

### **Training Your Dog Step 4: Finally Fastening the E-Collar and Helping your Dog Increase his Tolerance to Wearing the E-Collar**

- Ok, you know the ropes. You are going to fasten the E-collar on your dog and work with him to increase the time that he wears his E-Collar.
- Create that quiet place where you and your dog can focus on each other without any distractions.
- Again, bring out the heavy artillery, line up major treats — cheese or liver or meat or chicken, whatever your dog finds most irresistible
- Then put the E-collar on your dog and buckle it.
- Treat and Praise overwhelmingly.
- **Be very careful at this point! Each dog is different and their reactions are different when the E-collar is buckled. Remember to keep yourself calm so your dog doesn't pick up on your fears and stress. Use your judgment here. If your dog reacts badly to the E-collar, stop and repeat the step above for a few days, perhaps with more enticing treats. If your dog accepts the E-collar with treats and your praise, leave the E-collar on a little longer each day until you build up to five minutes. If you feel that you need help, work with your vet or a trainer. Go slowly and take as much time as your dog needs!**
- Leave the E-collar on for a minute (depending on your dog's reaction) while you treat and constantly praise your dog.
- Do NOT leave your dog alone for a second at this point.
- Remove the E-collar when your dog shows signs of being bored or exhibits body language or behavior that says they've had it.
- Put the E-collar down and walk away.
- Pick up the E-collar occasionally and move it around, always leaving it on the ground. Put it near his bed, among his toys, next to the food bowl. Move it around in different rooms of the house, always leaving it where he can examine it.
- Repeat this every day, gradually increasing the time the E-collar is on your dog's head until he will wear it willingly for 5 minutes at a time.

**What to Expect After Surgery — When we pick up our dog at the vet's office after surgery, we're often nervous and there isn't much time to go over instructions with the vet, so be sure to get all instructions in writing! Written instructions should at least include explicit medication instructions, wound care instructions, E-collar instructions, physical restrictions, feeding instructions, a list of what to expect after surgery, 24/7 vet contact numbers, an appointment for follow-up.**



Because of all of your hard work together, when your dog wakes up after surgery wearing the E-collar he shouldn't find it to be such a traumatic experience. There are several things you should be aware of that will make life easier for you and him:

- He will need help with food and water. The easiest way to accommodate the E-collar is to use a single raised feeder. With a little help guiding him, you can show him how to position the E-collar over the feeder. Some dogs pick this up all on their own; others need help figuring out the best way to eat and drink.
- Be prepared for banging into furniture and walls until he figures out how to judge distances more accurately. Ask your vet if there are any specific dangers if your dog jolts his head when the E-collar hits something, especially if he has any surgery involving his eyes, ears, face, etc. You may want to rearrange furniture or confine your dog to a specific room in the house or a crate, depending on your veterinarian's instructions.
- Do not make a fuss or indicate how upset you are to see him like this. Dogs pick up on our emotions so quickly and if he sees you upset it will only upset him ever further.
- Be prepared to have bruises down the backs of your legs during this time. Most dogs are used to following their owners closely, and even more so when they are unsure of themselves and so you can expect to be rammed repeatedly! This is where it would be helpful to research types of collars in advance and have your vet provide you with one with rubber on the edges of the cone.
- Discuss this with your vet: Once a day, you will should put your dog on a grooming table if you have one and remove the E-collar and thoroughly clean his ears and wash his face. If you do not have a grooming table, you need to be sure that your dog is restrained while you work on them. Wearing their leash and having another person with you is helpful. Depending on what surgery or injury your dog has, you don't want them running and jumping around if they get away from you. Cleaning the ears is especially crucial with long-eared breeds such as spaniels. The closeness of the E-collar creates heat and humidity which is extremely conducive to ear infections. Get an ear cleaner containing a drying solution in it, and also one with natural anti-fungal ingredients such as aloe, wintergreen, or even the blue power cleaner. Alternate these each day. Do not pour them directly into the ears; use makeup pads or cotton balls, which can be found cheaply at any store and saturate those with the ear cleaner and wipe out the ear canal and under the ear flap thoroughly, then finish with the cleaner containing the drying solution. Using a washcloth, gently wipe your dogs' face and then brush him all over while giving the



face and ears a chance to dry thoroughly. Clean the E-collar both inside and out and let it dry completely before putting it back on your dog. Always finish with major praise and a treat.

You must always work hand-in-hand with your vet, keeping in constant contact with them about your dog's behaviors and healing progress. The outcome of your dog's surgery and overall healing depend on your following your veterinarian's instructions to the letter. This cannot be stressed enough!

Helping your dog adjust in advance to the E-collar with your love, patience, training, and with the power of treats, should make the E-collar experience much more positive and successful for both of you!