



The Pet Column

By Abbas Hussain of Principal Pets

Does Your Dog Pull?

If your dog pulls, you may have been recommended a choke collar by a trainer. Choke collars are generally made of metal chain material which tightens around a dog's neck when the handler pulls or jerks back on the leash. 'Aversive' trainers will often use choke collars to perform 'corrections', essentially causing the dog pain any time he pulls on the leash or misbehaves. While this type of training may stop the pulling or suppress a certain behaviour at that particular moment, it does nothing to address the root of the dog's issue. Leash corrections that are given on these collars exacerbate behavioural issues such as fear and aggression.

What are you teaching your dog?

If your dog reacts on the lead and you correct your dog when he reacts to another dog, what are you actually teaching your dog? When he sees another dog and then feels pain you are teaching your dog an association with other dogs and physical pain. Rather than correct the reactivity you could be teaching your dog an aversion to other dogs, leading to increased anxiety when meeting new dogs and exacerbating fear and aggression in your dog.

Are choke collars safe?

Even if used without corrections, choke collars can still cause pain, discomfort, and injury to a dog's neck, head and spinal cord.

- If you feel your dog's neck with your hands followed by your own neck, you will see how similar they are.
- The trachea, oesophagus, thyroid gland, lymph nodes, jugular vein, muscles and spinal column are all located in similar places.

What kind of injuries can choke collars cause?

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.

- Studies show that the gland can get severely traumatised whenever a dog pulls on the leash and becomes inflamed.
- When this happens it is 'destroyed' by the body's own immune system which tries to remove the inflamed thyroid cells.
- The destruction of these cells can lead to hypothyroidism, which can then cause loss of energy, weight gain, skin problems, hair loss, ear infections and organ failure.

Choke collars also affect other areas of the body including the spine and eyes.

- A study shows that choke collars can contribute to neck spine and back injuries.
- Another study reveals that when force is applied to the neck via a leash and a choke collar, pressure in the eyes is significantly increased. This type of pressure can cause serious injury to dogs already suffering thin corneas, glaucoma, or eye injuries. The same study was done with dogs that were wearing harnesses, which had no impact on eye pressure when force was applied.

If these collars cause pain, why does my dog still pull?

Dogs cannot tell us when they are in pain. They put up with near strangulation because the drive to pull forward overrides the pain at that moment, but the after-effects are serious and long lasting.

What other options do I have to stop my dog pulling?

There are more effective and humane alternatives to using a choke or prong collar on your dog.

- Find a positive trainer to help you teach your dog to walk on a loose leash.
- Even large strong dogs can be walked without the use of a choke or prong collar.
- Consider a chest-led, no-pull harness, such as the HALTI Harness

Don't take our word for it. Dr Matthew Sinovich, BVSc (Hons), MRCVS, a vet at Leahurst, has this to say on choke collars.

"I have spoken to a number of trainers and behaviourists about positive and negative reinforcement and behavioural modification and in this age of freely available information I can see no good reason why force-based training methods should be advocated when there are research-backed alternatives. The use of pinch or choke collars can cause a variety of soft tissue trauma and even lead to strangulation and death in the most extreme cases."

Beavers, Cubs and Scouts

In Heswall we have a combined total of Beavers, Cubs and Scouts of 254 young people with a further 42 Young Leaders/Explorers, with a dedicated team across 4 Groups, 3rd Heswall, 4th Heswall Sea Scouts, 5th Heswall and 6th Heswall. Unfortunately we have waiting lists in this area between the Groups of over 45 that could join now. We are currently looking for adults to help in all sections and all groups, but particularly in the Beavers at 6th Heswall.

Do you have what it takes to help support these sections? The sections normally run for an hour and we are happy with flexible volunteering. For further information please contact:-

Dc@westwirralscouts.org.uk
www.westwirralscouts.org.uk

BEAVERS+ cubs+ SCOUTS+

Barnstondale visitors will be going places this year, thanks to Lookers Vauxhall

Visitors to Barnstondale Activity Centre are set for some exciting adventures this year, thanks to a fabulous Christmas present from Lookers Vauxhall Birkenhead. The company has presented the charity with the use of a 17-seater minibus free of charge throughout 2018. The charity is planning to raise funds to buy the nearly new vehicle at the end of the year.

Barnstondale is an activity centre situated in the rural heart of the Wirral, set in 15 acres of natural woodland and countryside. The centre welcomes day visitors and residential guests to enjoy its many facilities. Barnstondale is an 'inclusive' centre, which means it provides adventures and outdoor activities for all ages and abilities. Use of the Lookers minibus will enable centre staff to take visitors further afield to take part in adventurous activities such as kayaking.

Martin Benbow, General Manager at Lookers Birkenhead, said: "We were first made aware of the fantastic work Barnstondale does through Network Q's ongoing support for the charity. When we heard Barnstondale would find the use of a new vehicle useful, we were keen to help. We are delighted to provide this minibus, which has just 200 miles on the clock, to support the charity's adventures."

Heidi Hughes, Business Development Director at Barnstondale, said: "We are so grateful to Lookers for providing us with this minibus. Not only do we get to use the minibus free of-charge for 12 months, but we also get to buy it for a fraction of its list price of £34,000 at the end of the year. We will be starting fundraising to buy the vehicle straightaway, so anyone interested in helping us reach our target of £13,000 or finding out more about the work Barnstondale does, should give us a call on 0151 648 1412 or visit the website www.barnstondale.org."



Heidi Hughes, Business Development Director at Barnstondale with Bernie Owl, accepting the keys to the new minibus from Martin Benbow, General Manager at Lookers Birkenhead.