

Don't Choke Me!

4 Myths About the Prong Collar

By Pooja Menon



Picture this scenario. You're crossing the street and ahead of you is a man walking his dog. His dog has on a prong collar—a metal collar with fanglike protrusions encircling the neck—and he's straining on his leash. The owner gives a tug and the fangs tighten around the dog's neck, choking him and stopping him short. Once he recovers his breath, he resumes dashing forward. Frustrated, the owner jerks the leash again. The same process plays out over and over, with the dog no more aware of what his owner truly wants from him.

Even to the untrained eye, this process seems painful and ineffective. Why then do we as dog owners' continue to use the prong collar to get our dogs to listen to us?

In order to understand this phenomenon better, we're sharing four of the most common myths behind the prong collar's continued popularity and the truth behind each misconception.

MYTH #1 Prong collars are designed to emulate a mother's "correction" method—the pinch made by a prong collar imitates the pinch made by a mother's mouth when she grabs her puppy's neck during a correction.

FACT: There is NO scientific evidence to back this claim. In actuality, the chances of your dog making such an association are little to none, especially since his mother would not be physically present during the correction.

MYTH #2 Dogs have thick fur around their necks that acts as padding, so prong collars don't actually hurt them.

FACT: Wrong. The skin on a dog's neck is significantly thinner than the skin on our necks. Theirs is comprised of 3 to 5 cells, while ours is much thicker, comprising of 10 to 15 cells! This means that they feel the squeeze of a prong collar far more than we would if we were to test it out on our own necks. Studies have also shown that frequent pressure around dogs' necks can cause a host of problems, from skin punctures to crushed tracheas, and even spinal cord problems.

MYTH #3 My dog is too stubborn and the prong collar is the only way to stop him from...(insert undesirable behaviour here).

FACT: Your dog might be responding to the prong collar momentarily—every time you correct him with a yank to the leash, he essentially chokes and suffers enough discomfort and pain to listen to you. While this method is temporarily effective, it does not fix the underlying problem.

You might also run the risk of encouraging more negative behaviours in your dog that once never existed. For example, if your dog experiences pain or discomfort via you yanking him back every time he tries to greet another dog while out on a walk, he'll soon learn to associate the presence of other dogs with pain and discomfort, resulting in harder issues to fix, like aggression and reactivity to other dogs. He might also start to associate walks with you as a precursor to pain and discomfort.

MYTH #4 My dog isn't treat motivated. This is the only thing that works.

FACT: Remember, pain and discomfort seldom produce positive results. It's far better to do a little sleuthing and find out what does motivate your dog to listen. If he does not respond to the treats you offer, try others. Boiled chicken, cheese, or hot dogs might just do the trick. Some dogs might even prefer tennis balls to food. So get busy and find out what makes your dog tick.

Dogs—no matter how adorable—can be frustrating. They have minds of their own and a curiosity that often lands them in trouble. But by using positive reinforcement training, your dog can learn just about anything. Heck, he'll want to!

So bin that prong collar and get yourself and your dog signed up for some training classes. We promise you, the process will be pain free and the bond between the both of you will be even stronger. ■