

Pulling on the Leash

By Sherry Woodard

Most dogs want to go out for walks and get very excited when the leash is brought out. But, do you have one of those dogs who is so enthusiastic that he literally pulls you out the door? Walking should be fun for both you and your dog – and there are some things you can do to make it so. Start by checking your dog's collar. It should be snug enough so she cannot pull out of it, but not so tight that you can't put a finger or two between the collar and her neck.



If your dog is especially rambunctious, one strategy you can try is playing with her in your yard first to release some of her excess energy. You will find that a tired dog can focus and will learn more easily than a wired dog.

The way to teach a dog to walk with a loose lead is to reward for a relaxed pace and stop walking if you are being pulled. You can begin teaching a dog to walk nicely on lead in your home or yard. Put a four- to six-foot lead on your dog's collar and talk to her as you start to walk. If she walks without pulling, praise her and walk some more. If she pulls on the lead, stop, and wait until she stops pulling. As soon as the tension on the lead is released, praise the dog, offer a quick treat, and then continue walking.

If your dog continues to pull after you stop walking, turn and walk the other way. A change in direction will cause her to be behind you. Then, as she comes by, you can get her to focus on you with praise and a treat. Don't yank the leash when you change directions – let the action itself serve as the correction. One good technique is to practice a lot of random direction-changing, so the dog gets used to focusing attention on you and moves with you.

If you're not making much headway with a regular collar, you might want to purchase a head halter. Made by Gentle Leader, Halti and other companies, these halters can be valuable tools for training dogs to walk on a loose lead. They wrap around the dog's muzzle and operate on the simple principle that a dog will follow where his head leads him. A gentle tug on the head halter will turn the dog's head back toward you. A head halter will not choke or pinch your dog. Once your dog is used to the head halter, it can make training much easier.

Keep in mind, however, that all dogs need a little time to adjust to wearing a head halter. At first, they often try to take off the foreign object. Each halter will come with fitting instructions, so make sure that you read the instructions and properly adjust the halter to fit your dog. If you don't want to use a head halter but have a dog who tries to pull back out of his collar, a martingale collar may be a safe choice. They are designed with a fabric loop that tightens if the dog pulls.

Be patient and persistent – your dog will improve with practice. She'll gradually learn what to expect, and both of you can enjoy daily exercise. Your efforts to train your dog in this and other aspects of good behavior will be rewarded – you'll have a polite, well-socialized animal who is welcome in many places.

Sherry Woodard is the dog training and care consultant at Best Friends. She develops resources and provides consulting services nationally to help achieve Best Friends' No More Homeless Pets mission.

See also: Head Halters for Dogs