

Check/Choke Chains:

Teaching your dog obedience training can be simple and fun with the correct information and some patience. Check, or “choke”, chains are still widely sold and common among large, strong or boisterous breeds. Popularised by Mary Woodhouse in the 1970’s, these collars are at best cruel and at worst extremely dangerous. **Here is a quick low-down on the problems with them and some useful alternatives.**

1. Although often used by misguided owners to help with behavioural problems such as pulling, check chains can actually cause and compound behavioural issues.
2. If you have difficulty restraining your dog or with pulling on the lead, see my Heel Top Tips. Teaching your dog not to pull using safe and supportive aides such as the Canny Collar are great alternatives to check chains but don’t replace the many benefits of professionally guided, positive training. See the website for video demonstrations and a list of available courses.
3. Check chains damage dogs, cause pain and are directly linked to medical conditions such as injured ocular blood vessels; tracheal and oesophageal damage; severely sprained necks; fainting; transient foreleg paralysis; laryngeal nerve paralysis; hind leg ataxia.
4. **Professional statements:** “In a retrospective study on spinal pain, injury or changes in dogs conducted in Sweden, Hallgreen (1992) found that 91% of dogs with cervical anomalies experienced harsh jerks on lead or had a long history of pulling on the lead. Uses of chokers was also over represented in this group. This strongly suggests that such corrections are potentially injurious” – Karen Overall MA, VMD, PhD, DACVB Clinical Behavioural Medicine for Small Animals

“In 30 years of practice (including 22 as a veterinary advisor to a police dog section) I have seen numerous severely sprained necks, cases of fainting, transient foreleg paralysis and hind leg ataxia after robust use of the choke chain. In the 1970’s, when the practice of slamming the dog sideways with a jerk that brought the foreparts clear of the ground and two or three feet towards the handler became popular, the resulting painful condition was known as “Woodhouse neck” in this practice. Some of these cases exhibited misalignment of cervical vertebrae on radiographs. It is suggested that an existing spondylopathy renders these dogs more vulnerable to injury. My ophthalmology colleagues have decided views on the relation between compression of the neck, intraocular pressure disturbances and damage to the cervical sympathetic nerve chain resulting in Horner’s syndrome. I personally have seen a case of swollen eyes with petechial scleral haemorrhage and a number of temporarily voiceless dogs” – Robin Walker BVetMed MRCVS