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The Pulling Dog

Does your dog practically pull your arm off when you take him for a walk? Has it become so unpleasant that you no longer want to walk him? Well, you're not alone. Many dogs that have never been taught to walk on a loose leash pull their owners down the street. There are ways to change this annoying behavior, however, and we have a few suggestions.

Dogs have what we call "**opposition reflex**", which means they pull against pressure. When a dog feels pressure on the front of his throat from his collar, he actually pulls against it. This is why choke collars only make the problem worse. The tighter the collar gets, the more he will pull - it's a vicious cycle. In addition, choke chain collars and prong or pinch collars are painful and can actually damage your dog's trachea. There is no need to hurt your dog because he is doing what comes naturally.

If you want a dog who walks politely on a loose leash you must teach him that this is what you want. Get out some really yummy treats. Put the dog on the leash (starting in the house), hold your hand containing a treat at your waist, and begin to walk. He will be interested in the treat so he will stick by you. Walk around and every once in a while praise him and give him a treat. Then move your practice sessions outside. Practice having him walk by your side in non-distracting environments before going to the park. Start in the backyard and then move to the sidewalk in front of the house. Build the behavior through praise and treats. He will want to stay by your side if you are the most interesting thing in the environment.

Another method is to "**become a tree**" when your dog pulls. Start walking, and whenever the leash becomes tight, you simply stop, plant yourself like a tree, and don't say a word. Your dog will eventually look back at you to say, "hey, why aren't we moving?". When he does this he will most likely move slightly toward you, loosening the leash. When there is slack in the leash, start walking again. He will eventually learn that when he feels tension on the leash, he doesn't go anywhere, but when the leash is slack he is allowed to walk.

The Gentle Leader® head halter is a wonderful training tool for pulling dogs. The Gentle Leader® was designed to work like a horse halter. Head halters work because if you control the head of an animal, you control the entire body. When a dog is wearing a Gentle Leader® head halter he is prevented from pulling because as he does, his head is brought around towards you, making it difficult for him to pull you down the street. The Gentle Leader® head collar may require some desensitization to help your dog get used to the feel of something on his face. This process usually involves a few days of putting it on and off several times - increasing the amount of time it stays on each time. To help the process along, offering extra special treats every time it's put on will help.

Another wonderful tool to help the pulling dog is the Easy Walker® or Sensation Harness®. These harnesses are designed so that the leash comes out from the chest instead of the back. So when the dog pulls forward - his entire front half moves around to the side, making it difficult to continue any forward movement. These harnesses rarely require any desensitization.

Even if you choose to use one of the tools mentioned above, it is still a great idea to teach loose leash walking so that someday you will be able to switch back to a regular buckle collar for walks.