

Behaviour Tips : *Proper Use of Body Harnesses for Rambunctious Canines*

Should I Use a Body Harness?

As with any tool, there are both pros and cons to whatever you choose to use with your animals. Familiarizing yourself with these benefits and drawbacks helps make your decision more personalized to your pet and their specific needs. The use of a body harness for your dog may be helpful in your walks if you wish to prevent slipping from the lead, increase the comfort of your dog, prevent damage and strain to the neck and back, as well as add overall control of your pet. Although these benefits can be seen with harnesses, it is important to make sure your harness fits well and securely to your canine's body and that you are using the proper harness for the intended purpose.

Benefits of Using a Body Harness

More pet owners are switching to body harnesses over regular collars when it comes to leash walking, but why? There are many medical and behavioural benefits that come with the use of body harnesses.

Leash walking with a traditional collar places a lot of pressure on the neck, especially in a dog who pulls. Over time, this pressure on the neck can lead to many medical concerns such as pressure on the trachea leading to tracheal collapse or an increase in the pressure of the eyes leading to chronic eye issues. Body harnesses remove some of the pressure from the neck and equally distribute it throughout the chest and shoulders to help alleviate some of these medical concerns.

Body harnesses can also be very beneficial in dogs that pull or react while on a leash. Body harnesses, especially those with a front clip, offer more control to the handler when a dog shows the tendency to pull towards cars, people, dogs or other triggers. Body harnesses may not be beneficial for dogs who may, as body harnesses – unlike the best headcollars - offer little to no control of movement of the head. Caution should be used with body harnesses in dogs that are averse to over-the-head motions or that show aggression towards people.





Back Clip or Front Clip for Leash?

There are two main options for connecting a leash to the harness of your choice. Choosing between whether to clip onto the front of the harness around the chest area or on the back of the dog is entirely up to the goals set for the use of the harness.

Use of a back-clip harness is highly recommended for both calm and small dogs. These harnesses allow the lead to not get tangled in the feet of the dog and allow for a more relaxed walk if your dog is not prone to pulling. Also, the pressure generated by a leash is now distributed to the front chest and shoulders, taking it away from the neck. Caution should be exercised when using this type of harness in larger breed dogs who pull as they may be able to use their weight to pull harder on the handler.

Use of a front chest clip is better suited for dogs in training and or need extra control. This harness offers a way to quickly correct your dog and can help prevent pulling and towing behaviours as their body will get redirected if they advance too far ahead of their owner. This harness type does, however, often lead to increased incidence of the leash ending up under the dog's feet and requires the handler to stop and safely correct the leash before continuing.

Choosing a Harnesses for Your Pet: All of the following harnesses can be placed while the dog has *all four paws on the ground* (sitting or standing), giving them a greater sense of stability and allowing ease of application

	<p>The RuffWear Front Range Harness offers an aluminum back ring as well as a reinforced webbing chest clip to redirect pullers. It is foam padded for extra comfort and 4 points of adjustment to ensure proper fit.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Pulling behaviour✓ Weight distribution on chest✓ Dual lead control	<p>The Haqihana Harness has a main leash attachment site on the back, but the front can accommodate another attachment. This harness is especially helpful for long or deep-chested dogs since multiple sites adjust.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Weight distribution on chest✓ Large and small breeds✓ Deep chested and long dogs✓ Dual lead control	
	<p>The Pet Safe Easy Walk Harness is inexpensive and is a front-attach, ONLY, harness. The belly strap is a different colour to help with orientation. If it is loose all the hardware hangs so fit matters. The clips mean you can put it on without reaching over the dog's head.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Pulling behaviour	<p>The 2 Hounds Design Freedom Harness has front AND back attachments, a velvet belly band, and clips so that it can be put on without reaching over the dog's head. It comes in a range of sizes, colours and widths (5/8" for smaller dogs).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Pulling behaviour✓ Sensitive skin✓ Dual lead control	

Although these tips are helpful, please discuss any behavioural/medical concerns with your local veterinarian. For all cases where you still have concerns, seek specialist services (www.dacvb.org). At AVC you can contact the AVC Behavioural Medicine Service (AVCBehaviouralMed@upe.ca).