



## Why We Do Not Support the Use of Prong Collars

If you ask your local pet store how to get your dog to pull less, they are likely to offer you a collar that has spikes arranged in a semi-circular fashion into a collar that fits around your dog's neck. If your dog pulls, the prongs poke into the dog's neck. If it makes your dog pull less, what's the harm?

As a certified behaviorist, I would like to share what the potential harm can be from the use of this type of collar:

- **Force:** The amount of unrestricted force that can be applied to your dog's neck may injure them. Dogs can easily learn to lean into the collar and still pull while wearing it, and the prongs can cause tissue injuries when this happens. If you imagine it tightening around your own neck, you can visualize the pressure it puts on your circulatory system, even your eyes. Our Clinic veterinarians are exquisitely aware of this, and that is why they ask clients not to use the collar on their dog, especially after your dog has been intubated for surgery. Our Angell Emergency vets have had dog injury cases from some brands of prong collars. So, physically, it is not recommended.
- **Superstition:** When the collar works to reduce pulling, it does so because it is an unpleasant (aversive) stimulus. The dog lessens their pulling to avoid something they don't like. If your dog sees another dog or person, and they lunge or leap in that direction, their neck is pinched in an unpleasant way. They could have lunged because they love people or dogs, and they received an uncomfortable "pinch" when they lunged. Since they are looking at that other dog, person, or other stimulus in the environment, they can then associate that stimulus as the item that caused the unpleasantness. Though the other dog or person did not cause the collar to pinch your dog, your dog may lunge and bark in the future the moment it sees others, in order to prevent the pinch from happening. Your dog has now made a superstitious association: other people and dogs do *not* cause the pinch, but your dog does not know that, and he does everything he can to keep others away: this usually look looks like a whole lot of additional lunging, and then more force is needed to stop the dog from pulling...and you can see the sort of unwanted spiral this causes.
- **Safety:** If two dogs wearing prong collars interact, the collars can become entangled, the dogs can panic and a bad dog fight can ensue. Also, the prongs can come apart, leaving your dog with no collar on.

- **Alternatives:** If you use an aversive stimulus to get your dog to not pull, you have not taught your dog what to do (walk in heel position), and if you use a regular collar, your dog will still pull.

*We recommend that, if your dog is a strong puller, you use either a Gentle Leader head harness or a Sporn head harness and/or teach your dog that they can earn treats and toys for walking with you. Also, register for a rewards-based training class and get help from a qualified professional there with your dog's behavior. This takes time, but is safe and enjoyable, and your dog will be better able to interact pleasantly and safely with you and with others in your community. See our website for training information: [www.mspca.org/dogtraining](http://www.mspca.org/dogtraining).*

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