

The choke chain—more than correction?

A chiropractor warns that vital damage may result

by Myles A. Medford, D.C.

Have you ever had someone place a chain around your neck and then suddenly pull back with a hard jerk upon it? This is something you would not tolerate, and would consider to be inhumane and torturous. The laws of the land would not permit such an action. Yet, many dog handlers are subjecting their dogs to this same type of action several times a day, throughout the dog's entire life span, with little or no thought of it being inhumane or torturous.

When I first started my research in quadruped spinal manipulations (animal chiropractic) I was quick to notice that most of my failures in treating animals, were due to human interference with the body's ability to correct the condition after treatment was given. One of the means of interference was the immediate placing of a dog back on a chain after the spinal manipulation had been given. One Gernam Shepherd had to be put to sleep because of this action. He was a watchdog and the owners normally kept him on a chain. He lurched at the first passerby and my treatment was voided. He could not recover under those conditions.

The force exerted on the neck of that German Shepherd, was as great, if not more, than the average person would obtain in a severe rear-end accident in which he received a whiplash-type injury. There is not one of us who would willingly let this happen to us,

yet we put our dogs through this type of treatment constantly. Not only are dogs that are chained subject to this whiplash-type injury, but so are those dogs who are trained by the use of a choker collar. Obedience classes and other training centers make use of chokers constantly.

There is apparently no thought given to the physical harm that can be done to the dog through this type of handling. We praise the dog for good performance. We are proud of his performance. We think he is doing well to respond to our treatment with the choker. He is, but at what cost to his health and happiness? Strong jerks can and do create spinal misalignments which can and do create illness and lameness which many times will baffle veterinarians.

I have been appalled at the amount of force exerted by some handlers while training or working their dogs. That pulling, or force, places a backward and upward strain upon the dog's neck, straining ligaments and muscles surrounding the spinal column. This can very easily create a whiplash type of injury and bring about illness.

The dog on a leash attached to a choker faces another dilemma that is just as severe. The pulling on the choker as the dog pulls at the chain may cause damage to the tracheal membranes. My Chihuahua-Poodle cross used to "walk" me. He was very aggressive on the leash, and after about five minutes would be fighting for his

breath. Pressure upon the trachea, over a long period of time, could have caused damage to the spine as well as to his tracheal membranes. I now use a harness when I walk my Lhasa Apso. She can pull all she wants without any apparent danger to the spine or trachea.

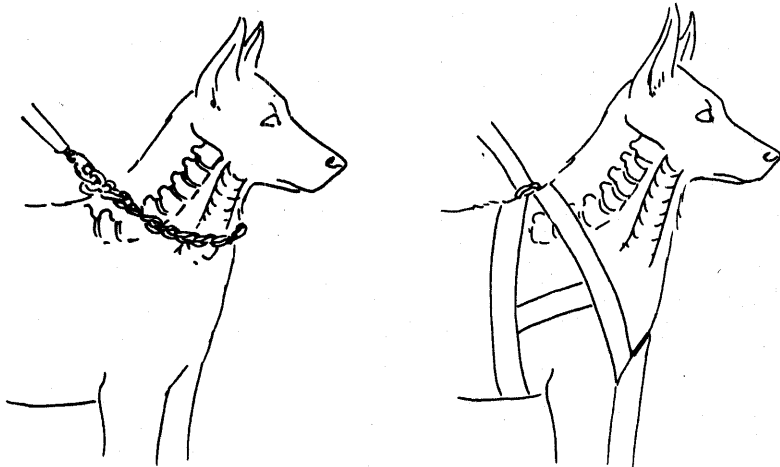
Many of you will disagree with me, and perhaps you are saying that I am wrong. But, have someone place a collar around your neck and tie a chain to the end of it. Now fasten the other end of the chain to something firm and run as hard as you can, stopping only when you are jerked backward and upward by the force of the chain snapping your back. You will be wearing a cervical collar pretty quickly, if you don't break your neck first.

Or, for a milder test, put the collar on and have it hooked to a leash with someone holding the end of the leash. Have him give a severe jerk every time he wants you to respond. Make sure the leash is jerked as you would when training, or working your dog. You would not be that foolish. Nor, would you put your child in the same circumstance. Yet, you would jeopardize often major investments in your dogs by treating them that way. You can jeopardize your dog's health by possibly creating spinal misalignments by improper handling. Those spinal misalignments could lead to illness and/or lameness.

Many of you are strong opponents to tail and ear cropping. Do you not realize that the chain and choker are far more inhumane than these simple operations? I do not condone cropping, myself, as I feel it is not necessary and ruins the looks of the dog. But, cropping only hurts at the time, if it hurts at all. Chains and chokers can cause damage daily, for the life of the dog. He is sentenced to a life of torture just to make you proud of him.

One of the first questions I ask a person seeking help for a dog is: "Do you use a chain or choker?" If the answer is yes, I advise them to use other methods of restraint or training. It is being done and can be done on a wider scale. Hand signals, electrical impulses, vocal commands and other methods are humane and do not damage the dog.

I realize that I have posed a problem without having sufficient answers. I



admit that a chain is cheaper than a run, fence, or other mechanical methods of restraint and training. But, we must remember that the collar is worn in a vulnerable spot on the dog's neck. The spinal cord, with nerve fibers going to all parts of the body, passes through the cervical spine. The spinal cord is at its largest as it leaves the brain at the level of the first and second cervical vertebrae. The whiplash-type injury created by mishandling of the dog closes off the neural opening, between the vertebrae, creating a neural impingement upon the nerve root as the nerve emits from the cord. If the muscle or organ which that nerve supplies can not get the proper innervation, lameness and/or illness will be the end result. Correction of that misalignment should restore the dog to a near normal, or normal condition.

Your dog not only would have more freedom in a run or pen, but he would be happier and healthier. He would not have to tolerate the constant jerking on his chain and whipping of his neck. Guard dogs do not have to be taught to jump at anything that moves. One New York State trainer will not take a dog until it is at least 18 months old. This way, the dog has already adapted to its owners and has taken on many of its owner's characteristics. The dog is taught to attack on command, or, if an owner is not present, when the need arises. I have treated guard dogs which have been far more gentle than many household pets, yet these dogs are effective when the need arises.

If you must put your dog on a chain, try something different. Why not make use of a strong harness or halter. I would suggest that if an unusually strong dog must be restrained that a metal harness perhaps made of chain and covered with canvas or leather, would be sufficient to hold the dog. Perhaps, an electrical impulse, built in to give a minute shock if the dog lurched to hard on it, would work. A radio signal could also be built in, similar to those used for trainign hunting dogs. Surely there must be some safe, humane sensible method of controlling dogs other than the chain or choke collar.

I know that I am proposing a radical change in many training methods. But, we can not continue to jerk our pets or working dogs necks out of killer. I predict that when new training methods are devised we will see a drastic drop in the hard-to-diagnose conditions that are "buffaloing" your veterinarian. Many of these conditions are brought about by spinal misalignments which impinge upon the spinal nerves. These misalignments could be the direct result of mishandling. The treatment of these conditions will be



voided as soon as the dog is put back on a chain or the choker is used, unless the owner stops using these methods of restraint.

Make good use of runs, pens and fences. Use a reinforced harness instead of the choker. Just to reinforce what I have been trying to say, have someone give your choker another jerk, or jump out at the end of your chain. See the reaction that is set up. Give your dog a break. Give him a pen

and/or harness.

"If I can achieve the results that I have been able to with chiropractic treatment, someone using the wrong method—or working in the wrong area—no doubt will bring on disease. A chiropractor must not only be duly qualified, but versed in the specific anatomy and physiology of the animal he is working on. Be very careful and selective!"