

Your Cervical Collar

Self-care at home

This handout explains how to wear and clean a cervical collar.

What is a cervical collar?

A *cervical collar* is also called a neck brace. It is a plastic device that holds your head and neck very still. Most times, a cervical collar is worn after major surgery or a serious injury, such as a broken neck.

Why do I need a cervical collar?

Your doctor has prescribed a cervical collar for you to wear during your recovery. The collar will help to keep your neck in the right position while it is healing.

When do I wear the collar?

Wear the collar at all times, even when you shower or bathe. After you wash the rest of your body, you will need a helper to take the collar off, wash your neck, and change the pads.



Your care team will show you how to place the collar in the right position.

How do I clean under the collar?

You must lie flat on your back to remove the collar unless your doctor says it is OK to be sitting.

What You Need to Do

- Lie flat in bed. Do **not** use a pillow.
- Keep your head in a neutral position. Do **not** bend your neck forward, backwards, or sideways.

What Your Helper Needs to Do

- Undo the Velcro straps and take off the front piece of the collar.
- Look carefully at how the pads are placed so that you insert the new pads correctly. Then take out the dirty pads.



Be careful not to move the patient's neck when removing and replacing the back piece of the collar.

- The pads attach with Velcro. When you insert clean pads, make sure the pads extend over the edge of the plastic collar to protect the patient's skin from rubbing against the plastic.
- Take off the back piece by carefully sliding it out from under the patient's neck. **Be careful not to move the patient's neck while doing this.**
- Replace the soiled pads on the back piece with clean ones. Change these as needed.
- Gently wash the patient's neck with soap and water. Fully dry the skin.
- Look for any redness or irritation under the collar. Look carefully over bony areas like the chin and collarbones.

To put the collar back on:

- Turn the collar so that the arrows on both the front and back pieces of the collar are pointing up toward the patient's head.
- **Place the back of the collar first.** Slide the back piece carefully under the patient's neck. Make sure it is centered evenly.
- To place the front piece, tuck it under the patient's chin and aim the sides slightly up toward the ears.

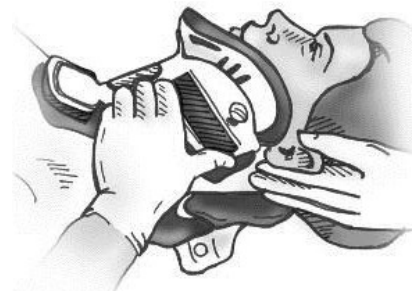


Arrows should point up toward the patient's head.



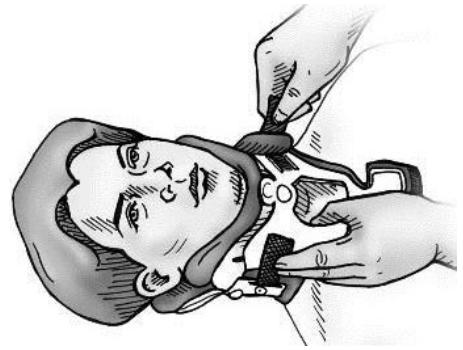
Tuck the front piece under the patient's chin.

- Without pushing backward on the collar, curl the sides around the side of the patient's neck.



Curl the sides of the collar around the patient's neck.

- Fasten the Velcro straps for a snug fit. Make sure there is no space between the front and back pieces of the collar where it connects at the sides with the Velcro straps.



Fasten the straps for a snug fit.

After the collar is in place:

- Have the patient carefully roll on their side. Put a small pillow or folded towel under their cheek so their head doesn't tilt sideways.
- Undo the Velcro strap on the upward side of the collar. Fold the back piece down. Check the back of the patient's head for any redness or irritation.
- Replace the back piece. Fasten it snugly.



Check the back of the patient's head for redness or irritation.

How do I know if the collar is on right?

- You should be able to insert **only 1 finger** between the bottom of the collar and your upper chest.
- You should **not** be able to tuck your chin into the collar, turn your head from side to side, or tilt your head up or down in the collar. If you can do that, the collar is not tight enough.

Can I reuse the pads?

You can reuse the pads after you have washed them. To do this:

- Wash the soiled pads with mild soap and water.
- Rinse all of the soap out.
- Wring out the excess water. Then wrap a towel around the pads and squeeze to remove as much water as you can. Then lay the pads flat to dry.

When to Call Your Doctor

Call your doctor if you have:

- Any soreness or irritation under the collar
- New or worse discomfort or pain
- New or worse weakness
- New or worse numbness

Who to Call

For questions and non-urgent concerns:

- Weekdays from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.:
 - Call the Spine and Neurosurgery Clinic at 206.744.9340. Press 2 to talk with a nurse.
 - Call the Orthopedic Clinic at 206.744.3462. Press 2 to talk with a nurse.
- After hours and on holidays and weekends, call the Community Care line at 206.744.2500.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

Weekdays from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.:

- Call the Harborview Orthopedic Clinic at 206.744.3462. Press 2 when you hear the recording.
- Call the Orthopedic Clinic at 206.744.3462. Press 2 to talk with a nurse.

After hours and on weekends and holidays, call 206.520.5000.

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