



## Elizabethan Collars

For many pet owners, having your pet be admitted for and go through a surgical procedure and rehabilitate from this procedure can be difficult and both physically and emotionally exhausting.

Furthermore, knowing you must take your pet home wearing an Elizabethan Collar, or E-collar as many veterinarians call it, or the “cone of shame”, as many pet owners refer to it, can be enough to cause intimidation, agitation (for you and your pet) and anxiety. Dealing with an E-collar on your pet can be as frustrating for you as it is for your pet. Watching your pet bang into walls and attempt to negotiate their surroundings with an e-collar in place can be difficult. You may feel discouraged and unable to help the situation. Veterinarians are often asked if there are alternatives to Elizabethan collars and why a pet needs to wear one in the first place. *Elizabethan collars are absolutely ESSENTIAL for your companion's recovery, and damage to the incision and surgery that can occur because of failure to apply the e-collar can be painful, costly and in some cases create irreversible damage to the original surgery.*

What is the E-Collar For?

Elizabethan collars are necessary because it is natural for your pet to lick, groom or scratch at a surgical incision or wound. This instinct is innate and difficult to truly anticipate the ferocity with which a pet can ‘go-at’ an incision until the damage is already done. Chewing on the skin or licking wounds could cause the incision to become reopened, as well as to introduce bacteria to the wound, which will cause a secondary infection. With a properly sized Elizabethan collar in place your pet will be unable to get to the incision. An Elizabethan collar allows the surgery to heal without your pet interrupting the healing process.

What are the Types of Collars?

Most Elizabethan collars veterinarians and pet stores offer are made of plastic and resemble a lampshade. However, there are more alternative, flexible, and softer variations available both on-line and from pet stores. In some cases you may find a collar in the same shape as an Elizabethan collar, you might be able to find a soft fabric collar that still wraps around your dog's neck keeping their head and mouth away from the wounds. These are almost like a neck brace and are effective, although whether this type is suitable depends where the incision is located. Flexible collars are available as an alternative to the harder plastic cones. Another alternative is an inflatable device. These inflatable collars resemble donuts around your dog's neck. In general, however, a vast majority of pets will be most reliably discouraged from their healing incisions with the original, old-fashioned clear plastic cone. **If an alternative cone or collar is chosen, you should ensure that your pet cannot get to their incision.**

### The T-Shirt Option

Another alternative to keeping your pet from getting to their incision is to have a t-shirt applied. Putting your pet in a t-shirt (small adult or infant size) can keep the incision protected while keeping your companion's mouth away from the site. You will need to determine, based on the location of the incision, if a t-shirt will be a suitable deterrent. If you choose to put a t-shirt on your pet and the waistline of the t-shirt is baggy, tie it in a simple knot on their back. This keeps it loose enough for comfort, yet tight enough so that it will not migrate off of the incision, allowing your pet access for incessant licking and chewing.

### The Wound Needs to Heal

The idea of an Elizabethan collar could seem archaic, or even 'cruel' for the recovery of a surgical procedure. However, for some pets and for some injuries, they are essential and mandatory to care for the recovering post-surgical tissues. Visiting a local emergency veterinary hospital for the repair to a surgical incision because your pet has chewed out the sutures, or caused a secondary infection, is probably not top on any pet owner's list of things to do!

Elizabethan collars can be large, making it difficult for your pet to maneuver around your home and can be stiff and unyielding. However, please know they are *essential* to your pet's healing process, and they are temporary!