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Elizabethan Collars in Cats

What is an Elizabethan collar?



An Elizabethan collar (also known as an E-collar or a buster collar) is a plastic hood or cone that helps protect injuries or wounds from further damage. These collars prevent the cat from licking or chewing at an injury on its body, or from scratching or pawing at its face or head.

Why does my cat need to wear an Elizabethan collar?

The collar's primary purpose is to prevent your cat from directly traumatizing a surgical site or injured area of the body.

Although many cats will initially resent wearing a protective collar and often vigorously try to remove it, the majority of cats quickly become accustomed to it. It is important to directly supervise your cat in the first few hours that she has the collar on so that you can ensure that she doesn't accidentally get a paw stuck in the collar or otherwise hurt herself.

How long does my cat need to wear this collar?

The collar must be worn until the wound has fully healed. Depending on the nature of the injury, it may be as short as a few days, or as long as a few weeks. To minimize the time that the collar must be worn, it is important to follow the instructions you receive from your veterinarian.

Can I take the E-collar off?

"These collars can be challenging to properly replace and reposition on the cat once they are removed."

In general, this is not a good idea since these collars can be challenging to properly replace and reposition on the cat once they are removed. However, in some situations, as advised by your veterinarian, you may remove your cat's collar for periods when you are able to offer close supervision. When replacing the Elizabethan collar, always ensure that you can fit two fingers comfortably between the collar and the cat's neck. This will ensure that the collar will not restrict your cat's ability to breathe or swallow, while preventing it from sliding forward over your cat's ears. If you are unable to replace the collar properly, contact your veterinarian immediately.

Is it safe to let my cat go outdoors wearing the collar?

"Elizabethan collars often restrict a pet's field of vision."

No. Elizabethan collars often restrict a pet's field of vision and will prevent your cat from seeing potential dangers. It is also easy for the collar to get caught in brush or on other objects, and may restrict its ability to walk in tight spaces or jump up or down. We recommend that a pet wearing an E-collar be kept indoors unless closely supervised when outdoors.

What special care does my cat need when wearing an E-collar?

Your cat can eat and drink normally with a properly fitted E-collar. It may be cumbersome or messy at first but most cats quickly adapt. You may need to elevate or change the shape of the food and water bowls to make it easier for your cat to eat and drink. Some cats find it easier to eat from a plate or saucer rather than a bowl, while others will initially refuse to eat while wearing the E-collar.

The E-collar should be kept clean and free of debris. It is important to check that the collar is not causing irritation or abrasions on your cat's neck. This should be done at least once a day. Your cat will be unable to groom itself while wearing a protective collar and it is important for you to brush or groom your cat on a daily basis, especially if it has long hair.

What else should I expect?

Many cats will inadvertently knock over objects or accidentally get stuck in confined spaces until they become accustomed to the collar. Be sure to remove any valuable or dangerous objects to a safer location to prevent accidental breakage or injury. Check your home for areas where your pet could become trapped and if possible eliminate these areas or restrict your cat's access to them. Problem areas include tight spaces behind couches, beds, or other similar objects. Some pets will become more nervous or easily startled while wearing the E-collar since their peripheral vision is obstructed and they are unable to see to the sides and above themselves normally.

*This client information sheet is based on material written by: Ernest Ward, DVM
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