

FACTSHEET

Elizabethan collars

An Elizabethan collar (E-collar, bucket, or the 'cone of shame') is a cone-shaped, wearable veterinary device mostly used to assist post-operative wound healing, or the treatment of dermatological issues.

They are typically made of hard, lightweight plastic and fasten to your cat's collar, or comfortably at the neck. E-collars are usually fitted by the vet after treatment. Your vet will advise you on the duration of E-collar wear, but it is usually a matter of days or up to a fortnight; or in rare circumstances, several weeks or more.

E-collars are beneficial in:

- Promoting wound healing and infection control by preventing your cat from licking, scratching, or biting the wound
- Allowing stitches to remain in place until they dissolve or are due for removal
- Preventing scratching of an itchy allergic/infected spot, which can cause further irritation and prolong recovery time
- Preventing your cat from licking off topical creams or ointments. While they are safe on skin, some creams and ointments may be toxic when ingested
- Preventing secondary infection from licking residual blood or other bodily fluids from a wound or allergy site
- Preventing self-trauma
- Making it easier for owners to medicate or apply creams.

Are there disadvantages?

The most obvious problem is that these can cause stress to your cat, especially during the first day or two. Signs of psychological stress can include:

- Fight-flight-freeze behaviours
- Hiding and other self-soothing behaviours
- Changes in appetite, sleep, energy levels, attention, grooming, elimination (urinating and defecating), vocalisation, mood or personality, and social interactions
- Attempts to remove the collar (head-shaking, rubbing against furniture or walls, or pushing it with their paw)
- Panting
- Nausea and vomiting
- Loss of interest in play, affection, and other normally enjoyable activities.

E-collars can physically interfere with eating and drinking, as your cat may be unable to reach their bowl or water fountain. Some cats are totally unable to eat or drink unassisted when wearing an E-collar.

They can also limit your cat's peripheral vision, and the sound of the collar knocking or scraping against surfaces can be particularly loud for your cat. Normal movement and rest can be hindered, adding to their stress. Some cats will even injure themselves trying to remove the collar.

If your cat needs to wear an E-collar, discuss short-term behavioural medication with your veterinarian, or consider interventions such as Zylkene and Feliway to reduce stress. Make sure your cat has been treated for fleas. Ask your veterinarian to demonstrate the correct way to attach and remove the collar, and make sure it is properly fitted.

Never, ever, laugh at your cat. At all times, seek to provide love and reassurance.

Immediately contact your vet if you notice:

- Severe distress: food or water refusal or no urination for 24 hours, prolonged social withdrawal, pronounced aggression, or evidence of self-mutilation
- Damage or removal of stitches
- Wound re-opening or heavy, unexpected bleeding
- Signs of infection or injury
- Anything that causes you concern: your vet clinic would rather you called sooner with questions than arrive later with a very sick cat.

Tips on managing a cat with an Elizabethan collar

Cat Protection member and adopter Judy offers these helpful tips.

My cat, Molly, wore an E-collar on two separate occasions following eye surgery on each eye. She wore the first collar for approximately three weeks and the second for two weeks, with a break of about a month in between.

The E-collars were necessarily of a rigid construction. The first was attached to a regular collar and was very difficult to remove. The second had a velcro fastener which was much easier to remove. This is what I learnt from Molly.

Drinking

Molly tended to crash into her water bowl when attempting to drink and instead of moving her head into a better position, she would walk around the bowl and try again. It is therefore important to:

- Leave plenty of space around the bowl so your cat can find a better position for manoeuvring their head into a drinking position

- Place bowl on a rubber mat to prevent it from being knocked over by the collar
- Use a bowl with a smaller diameter than the rim of the collar so that the collar encircles the bowl while the cat is drinking
- Ensure that the bowl and water level are sufficiently high so that the collar doesn't hit the ground when your cat is attempting to drink.

Eating

The food bowl, like the drinking bowl, must be high off the ground and with a smaller diameter than the rim of the collar. When trying to elevate the bowl, care must be taken so that it doesn't collapse when the cat knocks it with their collar.

I placed a small food bowl on top of two slightly larger bowls with a rubber mat underneath to stop the mini tower from moving when she knocked it. However, even this was not satisfactory for Molly who stopped eating for a worrying length of time. I therefore had to remove her collar and feed her on my lap for a time. (This was much easier to do when she was wearing the collar with the velcro fastener).

Medication

At times I had difficulty administering her medication when she was wearing the collar. It was much easier when she was wearing the velcro collar as I could remove it and hold her head while administering the meds.

Grooming

Cats can't groom themselves when wearing the E-collar so it's very important to stroke them and brush them every day. You may even have to wipe them after toileting.

Anxiety

Molly is a very placid cat but even she hated the E-collar. She was agitated at first and while this did improve over time, she was never completely relaxed with it. To help her settle I had to spend a lot of time with her on my lap stroking her and scratching her head and chin.

Mobility

Molly is an indoor cat and she has access to a secure walled garden. Even though she only had vision in one eye, she was able to find her way around the house and garden with ease, although she did bump into walls and furniture, especially at the beginning.

We're pleased to say Molly made a full recovery. Thank you, Judy for sharing your insights.

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