

Halo Vest Management



UHN

Information about how to manage day to day activities while wearing a halo vest



This brochure was created in collaboration with Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre, St. Michael's Hospital and University Health Network.

Halo Management

The halo vest is a treatment for people who have a broken neck. It is put on so that the head and neck will not move, helping the bones in the neck to heal. This usually takes up to twelve weeks.

Some General Information You Need to Know

- Your doctor and team will assess you regularly to decide when the halo vest will be removed.
- If you are helping a person in a halo vest, do not hit the metal framework because sounds carry through the pins in the skull. The noise is moves through the bone to the ear and sounds extremely loud to the person wearing the vest.
- **DO NOT DRIVE. IT IS ILLEGAL.** You are not allowed to drive with a halo vest.

This information is to be used for informational purposes only and is not intended as a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Please consult your health care provider for advice about a specific medical condition. A single copy of these materials may be reprinted for non-commercial personal use only.

© 2009 University Health Network. All rights reserved.

Author: Angela Sarro, Rosalie Magtoto, Julie Maurceri, Tracy Anthony

Created: 05/2010

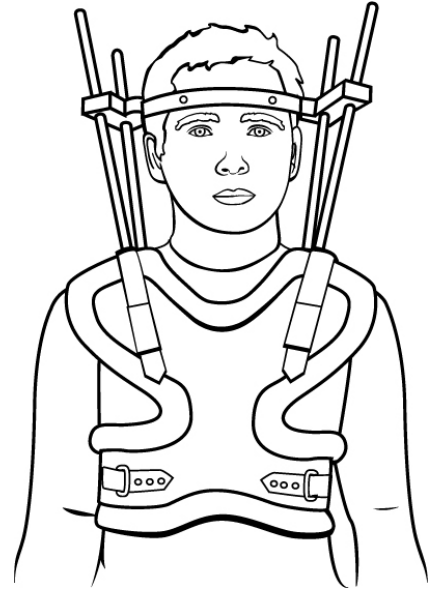
Form:D-5595



University Health Network
Toronto General Hospital Toronto Western Hospital Princess Margaret Hospital

What are the Parts of the Halo Vest?

1. A halo ring or crown is fixed to your head by four pins – one pin above each eyebrow and one slightly behind each ear. The pins go about 1 mm into the outer part of the skull.
2. The halo ring or crown is attached to the vest by metal posts, which keep the head and neck stable.
3. The halo vest is made of a hard plastic shell and lined with a soft fleece-like material. The entire halo vest weighs about 5 to 7 pounds (as much as a small bag of flour). The halo vest fits snugly. Do not loosen or adjust the halo vest by yourself. Speak to your doctor if you think it needs to be adjusted. Wearing the halo vest will change your sense of balance until you get used to it.



How to Care for the Pins

Use a Q-tip or gauze to clean around the pins 2 times a day with non-irritating soap (such as Dove) and water. Do not use ointments (such as Polysporin) around pin sites.

When cleaning around the pins, always check for the following:

- Redness or swelling of the skin around the pin site
- Discharge around the pins
- An open area where the skin has pulled away from the pin
- Pain or tenderness around the pin site
- Have someone check the pins at the back of the head for any of the problems listed above
- If you hear a clicking noise, which only you will hear, this could be a sign of loose pins

If any of the above happens, call your healthcare professional (surgeon, nurse practitioner, or clinic) that knows about your halo vest to talk with you about the situation. The pins may need to be tightened.

How to Care for the Halo Vest

- Areas of skin pressure may develop under the halo vest in areas that come in contact with the halo vest edges. Extra liner or foam may be put in to relieve these pressure areas. Speak to your healthcare team if you would like more liner or foam added to your halo vest.

- Try to keep the halo vest lining dry at all times. If the halo vest lining gets wet, you can dry it with a hair dryer on a cool setting.
- Always remember that the metal frame should never be used to turn or lift the patient.

Skin Care, Bathing and Dressing

- Wash your skin everyday.
- It is important to keep your skin and fleece liner as clean as possible.
- Check your skin under the halo vest every day during bathing for sores, blisters or redness. You will need to see a doctor if you see this.
- Whoever helps you to clean your skin should do it while you are lying down.

How to shower the lower part of your body

- Ask for help to wash the bottom half of your body
- In your bathtub, use a bath seat with a back rest and a hand held shower
- Use a non-slip bath mat on the bottom of the tub to prevent slipping
- Keep the liner dry at all times

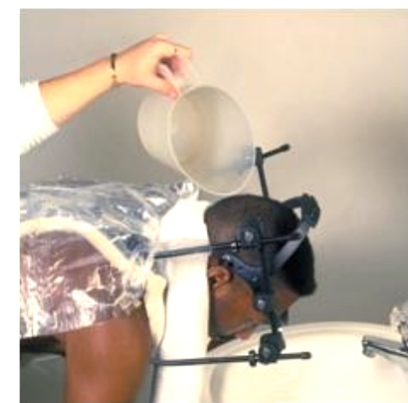
How to undo the halo vest for washing

- Ask someone to help you undo the vest one side at a time.
- Turn onto your side while lying flat on a bed.
- Undo the bottom buckles and straps on the upper front side of the vest.
- Protect the liner of vest with a towel so it doesn't get wet.
- Wash the skin with non-irritating soap and water and dry very well.
- Fasten the buckles and straps.
- Repeat this on the opposite side.



How to Care for your Hair

- Use a mild shampoo such as baby shampoo. If soap gets around the pins, just rinse it off very well and do pin site care (see previous section on pin care). Having soap around the area where the pins are is not harmful.
- Ask someone to help you with shampooing and rinsing your hair.



- Ask the person who is helping you to thread a towel through the bars of the brace and tuck it under the vest to keep the liner dry. Or, try using plastic wrap, a plastic bag, or a plastic poncho.
- Ask the person helping you to use an adjustable hand-held showerhead or a pitcher of water to wet your hair.
- Towel-dry your hair slightly, and then blow dry your hair holding the blow dryer at a distance of about 4-6 inches from your head. Be careful, the rods on the brace may become hot!

How to Dress

- You will need to make alterations to your clothing. Only dress while you are sitting. Do not undo the buckles and straps on the halo vest while you are sitting.
- You will find it easiest to wear loose fitting clothing over your brace. For example, you can wear zipped or buttoned cardigans, sweatshirts, clothing with a neck drawstring, or v-neck t-shirts.
- Use a cotton undershirt under the lining of the vest to help absorb moisture.
- For women, you may find it easiest to wear a tube top, bikini top with neck drawstring, or a strapless bra.
- To avoid falling, wear slip-on shoes that are supportive with rubber soles and do not wear heels.
- Use a long-handled shoehorn to put on your shoes if you need to. Do not wear open back shoes or flip-flops.

Everyday Activities

Sleeping

- You can sleep in any position that you find most comfortable, including sleeping on your back, on your side, or on your stomach. Some patients find sleeping on a recliner chair the most comfortable for the first month, until they become more used to the halo vest.
- If you need more support for your head, you can place a small pillow, rolled up towel, or a wedge of foam between your head and the surface of the bed.



Getting out of Bed

- To sit up, roll onto your side, swing your legs over the edge of the bed and use your arms as levers to help you sit up.
- DO NOT “sit-up” from a position lying on your back.



House Work

- Your halo vest may change your balance. You should not bend forward.

Cleaning

- Do not vacuum or do any heavy house cleaning
- You can do some light dusting if items are at eye level
- You can sweep the floor if you use small, controlled movements

Cooking

- Bending is more difficult in a halo. Doing things at eye level is much easier.
- Be very careful when using the oven, unless it is mounted at eye level.
- You can use the microwave, toaster oven, and stove top for cooking.
- Keep commonly used items and appliances on the counter top at eye level.
- You can slide heavier items such as pots and roasts along the counter top on a tray so you don't have to lift them.
- A trolley on wheels can also be convenient for moving items around the kitchen.
- To make it easier for you when you return home, buy or prepare frozen meals that can easily be re-heated in the microwave.

Washing the Dishes

- Be careful when loading the bottom rack of the dishwasher. Load the upper rack, or wash your dishes at the sink.

Laundry

- Do not carry heavy loads of laundry.

- Be very careful when using the washer and dryer since you need to bend and twist at the waist.
- You can sort and fold laundry, or do ironing.

Other Activities

Transportation

IT IS ILLEGAL TO DRIVE WITH A HALO VEST

- You cannot turn your head to check your shoulder for blind spots.
- You can ride in a car as a passenger. Do not twist or rotate your body when you get into or out of a car. Turn your entire body as one unit. For example, you can back into the seat buttocks first, and slide back until your head has cleared the door.
- If you are going on a long road trip, stop and take many breaks. Walk around for a few minutes before continuing
- If you take public transit (i.e. train, bus, subway), jostling movements may be uncomfortable.

Walking

- Walking is the only safe exercise we recommend while in your halo vest.
- Remember that even walking may be difficult in the beginning while you are getting used to the extra weight on your head.
- If you feel unsteady on your feet, ask someone to walk with you until you are better able to balance yourself. Be careful not to fall. Do not get discouraged; you will eventually get used to walking with your halo vest!
- Because you cannot turn your head, you will need turn your entire body to look when crossing the street.

Grocery Shopping

- Remember that you cannot lift more than 5 lbs in each hand. Do not carry large bags full of groceries. A bag of milk weighs about 5 lbs, and cans of soup weigh about 1-2 lbs each.
- Ask for help with heavier bags, or ask the cashier to put fewer items in each bag, and take several trips.
- If you will not have help carrying heavy items home, ask the grocery store if they can deliver to your door. Internet-based groceries deliver fresh groceries to your home at competitive prices.

Reading

- At first, your vision may be blurry and/or your eye muscles may tire more quickly. This is normal as you get used to the halo vest, and will probably go away with time.

- Your arms may tire quickly from holding up a book to eye level for long periods of time. A bookstand with prongs to keep the pages open can make reading more comfortable for you.

Using the Computer

- Make sure the monitor is at eye level so that you do not have to bend or extend your neck to see the screen.
- Change your position every 30 minutes by taking a break and getting up for a walk.

Drinking Alcohol

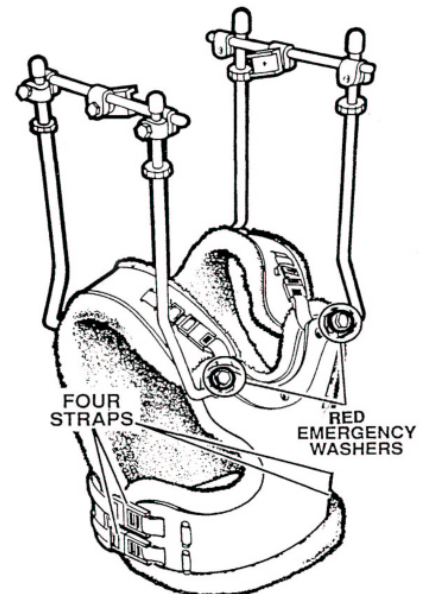
- Try not to drink alcohol. This may further alter your balance and put you at increased risk of falling.

Having Sex

- With a gentle and caring partner, you can have sex as long as you do not bend, twist, or lift.
- You may find it more comfortable to try different positions.
- The person with the halo vest should be on top.

In Case of Emergency, for example, Cardiac Arrest

- Remove the front part of the halo vest to do CPR.
- Patient must be lying on the back part of the halo vest.
- Using the wrench, loosen the two bolts through the emergency washers on the front of the halo vest.
- Release the side straps and rotate the front part of the halo vest to show the sternum.
- You can use the back part of the halo vest as the arrest board and do CPR as necessary.
- As long as the patient's body weight remains on the back shell, the back posts attached to the halo vest will help keep the spine stable.



Removing the Halo Vest

- The halo vest may be removed after 12 weeks. This may seem like a long time, but it is necessary.
- You will have CT scans or X-rays before removing the halo to make sure that the bone has properly healed.

- Wash your hair before removing the halo vest. You will not be able to wash your hair for 2 days after the halo vest has been removed, because you will need to let the pin sites scab over.
- Removing the ring is not painful, but you may feel pressure when the pins are loosened by your healthcare team.
- Put bandages over the pin holes if they are oozing. If they are not oozing, they should be left open to air at all times.
- Massage the pin sites with gauze 2-3 times every day to decrease scarring.
- Once the scabs have fallen off, you may put lotions or oils to the pin sites to reduce scarring if you wish.
- Your healthcare team will fit you with a removable neck collar and give you instructions on how to use it. Your healthcare provider will let you know how long to wear the neck collar.
- Because the muscles in your neck have not done any work for several weeks, your head will feel very heavy and your neck wobbly. The neck collar will help support your neck over the next few weeks.
- No physiotherapy is needed until you are completely weaned off the neck collar.

