James Paget
University Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

Information on wearing a neck collar: A guide to cervical hard collar care

Patient Information

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Introduction

This booklet has been designed to be a guide and overview about what to expect if you have injured your neck and have been advised by your doctor to wear a hard collar whilst it heals.

What is a cervical hard collar?

A collar has been supplied to you in order to support, protect, and limit the movement of your neck as you have sustained an injury to it.

There are multiple different causes of this but most commonly it is due to a cervical spine fracture. This is a break to one of the bones in your neck.

Most fractures (or other injuries) of the neck are treated 'conservatively' (i.e. allowed to heal without the need for an operation), and the hard collar will aid the healing process by:

- Maintaining your neck in correct alignment whilst it is healing
- Reducing the movement of the bones in your neck
- Supporting the bones, muscles, and soft tissues in your neck to hold the weight of your head
- Minimise further damage or injury through sudden movements of your neck
- Minimise pain and discomfort

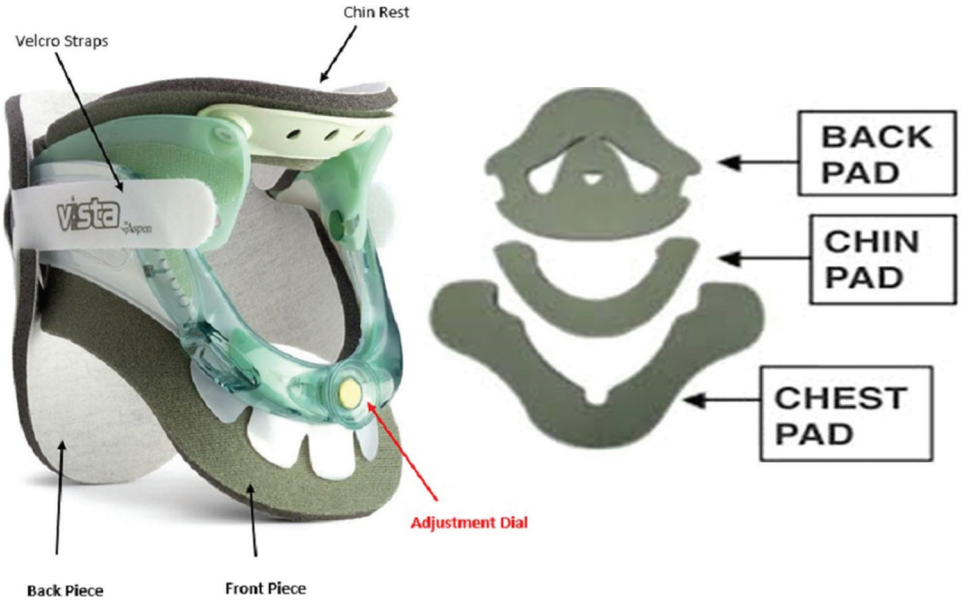
Occasionally, surgery may be required to manage an injury to your neck, and sometimes the doctors will want you to wear a hard collar after your surgery to promote healing.

It is important that you discuss your specific injury, its severity and what this means for you, with your doctor.

How long do I need to wear it?

Your doctor will have explained to you about your specific injury, and for how long you must wear the collar. For most patients who have injured or undergone an operation on their neck, this is approximately 12 weeks from the date of injury/surgery. However, this may vary according to the severity of the injury.

The collar



Labelled photo of a cervical hard collar: Velcro straps, chin rest, back piece, front piece, adjustment dial, and spare collar pads.

The Vista (Aspen) hard collar is a two-piece collar, with a separate front and back, which fasten together with Velcro.

Your collar will have been adjusted to ensure that it correctly fits you - please do not touch the adjustment dial following your discharge.

It should be tight enough to restrict your movement (for example, you should not be able to nod 'yes' or shake your head 'no'), but must not restrict things such as breathing or swallowing.

It is important that you wear your cervical hard collar at all times so as to ensure maximum effect and minimise further injury (unless your doctor tells you otherwise).

Please seek medical advice and support from your doctor or nurse if you are not completely comfortable wearing your collar.

Size

Correct sizing is important. If the collar is too big or too small, it will not do its job properly and may cause problems.

Although your collar will have been adjusted for you during admission, resizing is indicated if there is a change in any swelling, or if there is increased pressure to the chin, back of your head, collarbone, or shoulder. If you have any discomfort or find that your neck is in a painful position, please seek medical advice (details at the end of this booklet). You should continue to wear your collar but seek advice as soon as possible.

Collar care

Skin care

Wearing a cervical hard collar can cause the skin underneath to become hot and excessively sweaty, which can lead to skin breakdown from moisture damage. The collar itself puts pressure on the skin, which can also lead to skin damage.

We recommend that you:

- Keep your skin clean and dry
- Avoid using creams, powders, lotions, or oily substances on your skin under the collar
- Remove the collar every day (usually whilst washing and dressing) to wash and check the skin, particularly at the bony prominences. The usual pressure points are chin, collar bone, ear lobes, and back of the head
- It is not advisable to attempt to shower during the time period you are required to wear your collar. Your collar should be kept as dry as possible during washing. You can wash around your collar. It is helpful to protect the collar from splashes of water by using a plastic bag or towel
- Please contact us if you notice any signs of skin discolouration, redness and/or pain underneath the collar

Cleaning your collar

It is important to ensure that you clean your collar if it is visibly dirty or smells. This helps to prevent skin irritation. You should have been provided with a spare set of collar lining pads (please ask for some if you have not been).

If your collar becomes dirty:

- Remove collar (see next section on how to do this and to guide whether you need someone to help you)
- Remove Velcro lining pads from front and back of collar. Take care to note how you remove the pads as the spare set of lining pads will need to be reapplied to the same areas
- Clean plastic areas with mild soap and water and ensure the collar is completely dry (you/your assistant can use a towel)
- Attach clean pads to collar and re-apply the collar. The dark grey side attaches to the Velcro on the inside plastic part of the collar
- When you re-attach the pads make sure the plastic in the collar does not touch your skin
- Wash the dirty pads with mild soap and warm water only. Do not use bleach or detergents
- Lay your pads out on a flat surface to air dry. It should take less than 60 minutes for them to dry

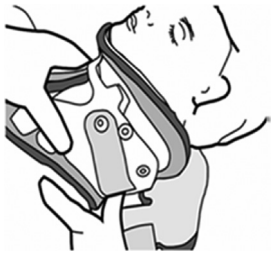
If it has been identified that you need to have your collar care completed by a healthcare professional, we will arrange this for you before you are discharged from hospital and you do not need to review the removal instructions.

Removing and re-applying collar

Method 1: Lying down (one or two assistants required)

1. Lie down flat on your back without a pillow.
2. Do not move your head or neck (extra assistant can support head, if required).
3. Note the position of the Velcro straps (you could take a photo to help with this) at each side, prior to the assistant removing them.
4. With the head held still, ask the assistant to remove the straps on each side of the collar and remove the front panel (leaving back piece in situ).

   Ask the assistant to change the pads of the front piece and clean/check the skin at the front of the neck.
5. Place the front piece back on - scoop upwards from your chest - ensure it fits centrally and snugly, with your chin near the edge of the chin rest.

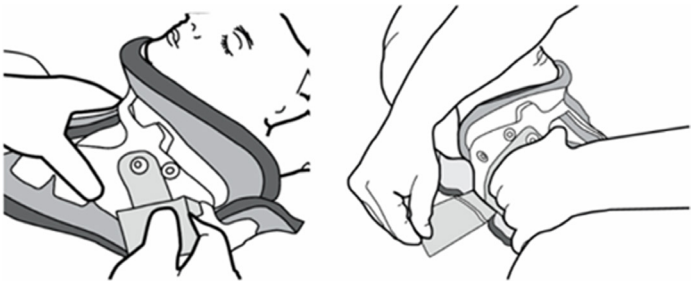


6. The assistant slides back panel of collar sideways from underneath you, pulling it towards one shoulder (extra assistant can support keeping head still, if required).

Ask the assistant to change the pads of the back panel and clean/ check the skin at the back of the neck (use a mirror to help, if required).

The assistant then slides the back panel sideways underneath the crevice of your neck, ensuring a central position where the Velcro straps are at the same position on each side.

Bring the Velcro straps forward evenly and re-attach in same position noted before removal. The grey pads on the back panel overlap the plastic sides of the front piece. The straps should be the same length on both sides.



7. Ensure collar feels in the same position as it was prior to removal and tighten straps evenly on each side if necessary.

Handy hints

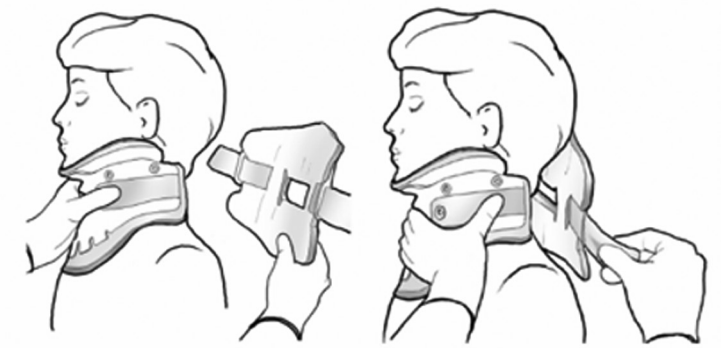
- The word 'Vista' should be readable to ensure back panel is the right way up. You should be able to fit two fingers between your collar and your neck
- Always ensure the back panel is replaced sideways, not vertically. Push the panel into the mattress if you are struggling to slide underneath
- Ensure any long hair is outside of the collar prior to re-attaching

Method 2: Sitting (one assistant required)

Please note: It is only safe to remove the collar in a sitting position if your medical team have advised that it is safe to do so, and you are confident that you (or the person you are helping) can keep your/their neck completely still throughout the process.

1. Sit upright in a stable position, ideally in front of a mirror.
2. Do not move your head or neck.
3. Note the position of the Velcro straps at each side, prior to removing them.
4. Gently remove the front (and then back) of the collar - ask an assistant to help you, if possible.

   Ask the assistant to change the pads and clean/check the skin of the neck (use mirror to help if required).
5. Replace the front piece of the collar, so that your chin is resting on the chin rest. Use one hand to hold it in place.
6. Assistant to replace the back panel of the collar centrally.
7. Adjust and tighten the straps one at a time, until they are in same position as prior to removal. The grey pads on the back panel overlap the plastic sides of the front piece. The straps should be the same length on both sides.
8. Ensure the collar feels in the same position as it was prior to removal and tighten the straps evenly on each side if necessary.



Useful videos

Please note: these videos are produced for health professionals and provide a useful guide for the management of the collar. However, they should not be used independently without the guidance of a therapist or nurse.

Please do not adjust the dial of the collar without discussing with your medical team.

Application of the Aspen Vista collar in lying

Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1JWFh3WXQOE

Application of the Aspen Vista collar in sitting

Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ytKoDUteRvw

Aspen Vista collar pad removal and cleaning

Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U5O4rSvPulo

General advice following injury

Pain management

You are likely to experience mild to moderate neck pain following your injury. If your injury was a cervical spine fracture, you may find that the pain worsens initially, but you should experience a gradual improvement over the next six to eight weeks. You should then notice a significant improvement by 12 weeks after injury. Regular simple analgesia (such as paracetamol) usually helps with this, and should be taken as per package instructions.

If you experience severe pain in your neck (particularly if this is new), or if you find the pain is significantly worsening, please contact your GP or call 111.

Activity

Whilst you must wear your collar at all times, we encourage you to slowly increase your activity level after your injury.

- Walking is encouraged - slowly try and increase walking distances
- It is important to keep your arms and legs moving to improve blood flow, and prevent them from becoming stiff or developing blood clots
- Take regular rest, and let your comfort be your guide on what is safe. Take extra care if you are at risk of falls

DO NOT:

- Carry out heavy lifting (more than 2kg in each hand), lay or sleep on your stomach
- Carry out activities which might put you at risk of sudden movements in your neck
- Perform any heavy housework, heavy exercise, or contact sports (i.e. lawn mowing, running, shovelling, vacuuming)
- Carry out activities which involve 'pushing' or 'pulling', or twisting/bending of the neck

Follow-up

Your doctor will arrange a follow-up appointment for you with the correct team. If you have sustained a cervical spinal fracture, this is usually within the pain clinic.

An x-ray is sometimes, but not always, required before this appointment to monitor the healing process. Your doctor will have told you if this is the case.

At your appointment, a clinician will assess your symptoms and discuss with you your continuing treatment plan for your care and whether a face-to-face appointment or further imaging is required.

When should I call for help?

Please seek advice from the James Paget Orthopaedic Centre if:

- Skin around collar becomes damaged
- Increase in tenderness, pain, or discomfort around the collar
- The collar is not fitting properly
- You have run out of replacement pads
- The collar itself becomes damaged

Please attend your local emergency department for assessment if you experience:

- Any new difficulties with breathing or swallowing
- New weakness, numbness, or pain in your arms and legs
- New visual disturbances
- New changes or loss of bladder or bowel function, or you develop numbness in your genitals

Frequently asked questions

Do I have to wear the collar at night?

Yes - unless otherwise instructed by your doctor. You may move freely in bed, so long as you are not laying on your stomach. You may use a pillow to help with your comfort if necessary, but take care that your neck remains in a stable position within the collar, and lay as flat as you are able to tolerate.

To get out of bed, it is recommended that you roll onto one side, bring your legs to the edge of the bed, and push up with your arms.

How do I shower and wash my hair whilst wearing the collar?

You can shower in a collar if you feel safe enough and use a non-slip mat; however, it is advisable, instead, to sit down to wash at the sink. The therapy team can advise you further on any issues regarding bathing or getting dressed.

Covering the collar with a thin waterproof material (such as cling film) may help to prevent it getting wet whilst you are washing your hair but when you finish you will need help to remove the collar, dry it, change the liners (using the methods described above), and re-apply. Remember it is important that your collar remains completely dry for continuous wear.

Can I drive whilst wearing the collar?

No. Your hard collar is designed to prevent the movements of your head and neck which are required for safe driving. You must contact the DVLA to discuss this further and/or discuss with your consultant at your fracture clinic appointment. You should also check with your insurance company before you return to driving.

As a driver, it is your responsibility to make sure that you are in control of the vehicle at all times. You can contact the DVLA at www.gov.uk or telephone 0300 790 6806.

What clothing should I wear?

Wear clothing on the outside of your collar - the pads should be directly against your skin. Stretchy, loose clothing is recommended. Button up shirts may be easier for you to wear. Avoid pullover shirts and jumpers, as they are more difficult to get over your collar.

When can I return to work?

This will depend largely upon you and what sort of work you do.

It is usually safe to resume working at a desk as soon as you feel ready to do so, but please discuss with the clinician at your follow-up appointment before resuming any manual work. We can provide an initial 'fitness to work' note, and further notes can be obtained from your GP if required.

Will I need physiotherapy?

Physiotherapy is not recommended until after your neck has healed. A clinician will review your condition at your follow-up appointment, and recommendations or referrals can be made at this point. Most people do not routinely require physiotherapy. The neck muscles may initially feel weak or stiff after the doctor tells you that you can stop wearing the collar, but this usually recovers naturally.

If you experience any continuing weakness or a limited ability to move your neck, a physiotherapy review might be of benefit. You can refer yourself to the Norfolk and Waveney Community MSK (also known as NoW MSK and incorporating East Coast Community Healthcare) by scanning the QR code or visiting:

https://norfolkandwaveneycommunityhealth.nhs.uk/msk/

I have got a surgical dressing under my collar. How should I manage this?

Any wounds should be checked as part of your regular skin checks. Recommendations for caring for this wound or stitch removal will have been given to you separately when you were discharged.

However, if you see any new discharge, redness, or swelling from the wound, or find that the collar is causing irritation to the wound, please contact your doctor for further advice.

Contacts/further information

Hospital Switchboard 01493 452452

Orthopaedic Outpatients Centre including Orthotics 01493 452603

Opening times: Monday to Thursday, 09:00 to 17:00, Friday 09:00 to 16:30 and closed on Saturday, Sunday, and all Bank Holidays.

You should receive an appointment through the post for a follow-up appointment. If this does not occur, or if you have queries in regards to this or your injury, please contact:

Pain Management 01493 452383

Opening times: Monday to Friday, 08:00 to 18:00

References/sources of evidence

Promedics Manufacturers Guidelines. Available from: Promedics.
Link: https://www.promedics.co.uk/products/vista-cervical-collar-with-replacement-pads (Accessed 17 June 2026).

National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE). Spinal Injury: Assessment and Initial Management (Guideline: NG41]. Published: 17 February 2016.

Thank you to Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust for granting modification of their leaflet.
Link: https://www.cuh.nhs.uk/patient-information/wearing-a-cervical-hard-collar-a-guide-to-collar-care-for-patients-relatives-and-carers/

Your Feedback We want your visit to be as comfortable as possible - talk to the person in charge if you have any concerns. If the ward/department staff are unable to resolve it, then ask for our Patient Advice and Liaison (PALS) information. Please be assured that raising a concern will not impact on your care.

OUR VALUES

#Proud of the Paget

Collaboration	We work positively with others to achieve shared aims
Accountability	We act with professionalism and integrity, delivering what we commit to, embedding learning when things do not go to plan
Respect	We are anti-discriminatory, treating people fairly and creating a sense of belonging and pride
Empowerment	We speak out when things don't feel right, we are innovative and make changes to support continuous improvement
Support	We are compassionate, listen attentively and are kind to ourselves and each other

Before leaving please complete a Friends and Family Test feedback card.
Help us transform NHS services and to support patient choice.

IN TRAN communication for all The hospital can arrange for an interpreter or person to sign to assist you in communicating effectively with staff during your stay. Please let us know.

For a large print version of this leaflet, contact PALS 01493 453240

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