

Halo Brace Care and Use Guide

What is a Halo Brace?

Just as a plaster cast protects a broken arm or leg while it is healing, a Halo Brace protects a neck fracture so it can heal properly. Wearing the Halo Brace can eliminate many weeks of staying in bed with traction. You may need to make some changes in your lifestyle to prevent any problems with the Halo Brace.



Balance and Movement

The Halo Brace weighs about 7 pounds. It may take you a week or more to get used to it. Do not get discouraged. You may have some trouble trying to balance yourself. Take special care not to fall. Gradually, you may become independent, but until you are, ask for help. Be patient. Eventually you will be able to bend over, put on your shoes and socks, and dress yourself.

You will be unable to turn your head. You must learn to turn your whole body to improve your side vision.

Hygiene

Bathing

You can loosen one buckle at a time to wash under the vest. Only do one side at a time. This should be done sitting or lying but never standing.

Those with altered balance or sensation must be bathed laying down and have help from someone to wash and evaluate the skin.

For those with normal sensation and balance, the safest way to bath is sitting in a chair by the sink.

Do not take a shower. You can take a tub bath in 4-6 inches of water. Use a bath mat in the tub to avoid slipping.

- Do not get the vest or liner wet. If you do, dry with a blow dryer.
- Do not get too close with the dryer.
- Do not use powders and oil-based lotions - they can cake and be irritating

Shaving

This can be very difficult. It is best to use a disposable razor as the post may get in the way of an electric razor.

Washing Hair

- Thread a towel through the bars of the Halo Brace and tuck it under the vest to keep the liner dry. Saran® or another plastic wrap might be helpful.
- Ease hair through the top of the Halo Brace.
- Use a spray attachment on the sink or bathtub or a pitcher of water to wet your hair.
- You can lean over the tub or sink. Someone else should wash your hair.
- Wash and rinse well.
- Towel dry hair slightly. Finish drying with a blow dryer.

Hair Care

- Do not use hair dye or permanent wave solution. They could cause an infection at the pin sites.
- It is difficult to use a curling iron.
- Dandruff may be a problem. Washing your hair often may be helpful.
- Do not use dry shampoo.

Clothing - What to Wear:

- Large shirt or V-neck sweatshirt.
- Loose fitting dress.
- Blouse with neck drawstring or zipper.
- A bathing suit top that ties behind your neck is sometimes easier to put on than a bra.
- Flat heeled shoes or boots, the sturdier the better.

Care and Precautions

Pin Sites Care

Your nurse will show you how to care for the pin sites before you go home.

- Wash your hands.
- Moisten the cotton swab in normal saline.
- Wash each pin site. Do this as the doctor recommends.

Pain in the area may indicate that the Halo needs tightening. This should be done only by a qualified MD (such as the neurosurgeon or orthopedic surgeon) or the Orthotist as directed by the physician.

The pin sites are cared for with sterile technique during your stay in hospital or Rehab. A clean technique can be used at home.

It will be easier to clean the pins if the hair around them is cut short.

Do not pick at or remove scabs from the pin sites with your fingers or objects.

Call your Surgeon's office immediately if:

- The area around the pin is swollen
- The area around the pin is tender to touch
- You have any new discharge around the pin sites

Do not adjust the halo pins or jacket yourself. This is only to be done by a qualified professional.

Halo Vest

The Halo Vest fits snugly to ensure the stability of your neck. The vest may need to be adjusted if your weight changes. Do not change the buckle notches yourself.

Call your Surgeon's or Orthotist's office immediately if:

- You have painful areas on your shoulder blades, ribs, collarbones or spine. Your brace may need to be adjusted.

Loose Nuts and Bolts

Call your Surgeon's or Orthotist's office immediately if:

- The brace feels loose. They have the needed wrenches to tighten these nuts and bolts.
- The pins are painful. This may mean the pin is infected or loose and needs adjustment. Pins should not be painful once your initial headache has subsided (3-4 days).

Do not adjust the nuts or bolts yourself.

Common Concerns

Itchiness under the vest

When washing, you should be able to reach under 1/2 of the vest at a time with a facecloth to help with the itchiness. Do not use a blunt object to scratch the area. Try not to scratch so hard that you break the skin. A break in the skin under the brace may cause problems.

Swallowing

Always eat in an upright position. It may be difficult at first, but will become easier.

Avoid choking on foods and fluids by:

- Cutting food into small pieces.
- Taking smaller bites.
- Chewing well.
- Crushing pills if they are difficult to swallow. If you have any problems with opening your mouth, call your doctor.

Riding in the car riding as a passenger

You cannot drive a car with your Halo Brace. To get in the car, back in, buttocks first and slide until your head is cleared.

Sleeping

You may tire more quickly while you are wearing the brace. Do not be worried. Nap if you feel tired.

You may sleep on your back, side or stomach. Sleep in the position which you find the most comfortable. You may find a pillow under the knees relaxing if you are lying on your back.

You can sleep on a waterbed if you have one. Cover the mattress with a pad so the Halo Brace does not puncture it.

A towel or pillow tucked in between the bars may make your neck more comfortable.



Reading

This may be difficult since you cannot turn your head. You can use a music stand to hold your newspaper, book, or magazine. This keeps your arms from getting tired.

Pain

Acetaminophen (Tylenol® plain) tablets can be taken for discomfort. Two tablets every 4 hours are usually enough. If pain is persistent or constant, see your doctor.

Activity while wearing a Halo Brace

Your activity will likely need to change while wearing the brace. You can:

- Shop.
- Visit friends.
- Dine out.
- Resume sexual activity - do not pull or lean on the Halo Brace.
- Go to the movies.
- Use your common sense.

Be aware that people will look at you and your Halo Brace out of curiosity. Try not to let it bother you.

You should avoid:

- Sports.
- Crowds - your Halo Brace may be jolted and the screws may become loose.
- Overindulging in alcohol or using drugs.
- Lifting.

How long will I wear the Halo Brace?

The Halo Brace is often kept in place for 12 weeks or longer. You will be given an appointment to come to the Surgeon's office after you leave the hospital or Rehab. The doctor will check your Halo Brace and schedule another appointment for the Halo Brace removal.

Halo Brace Removal

This will only happen after an X-ray of your neck shows satisfactory healing. It will take about 10 minutes to remove the Halo Brace and causes very little discomfort. You may be fitted with a collar according to your doctor's instruction. Check with your doctor to see when you can resume your normal activities, driving and/or return to work.