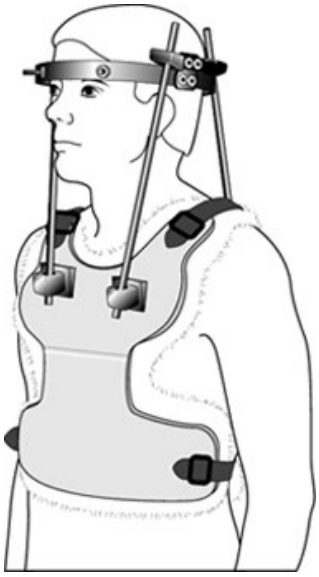
Using Your Halo Brace at Home

A halo is placed to hold your neck and the bones in a fixed position. It controls and supports your neck posture. It can help reduce pain and prevent further injury. This helps healing. A halo is placed when you have dislocated or broken the bones (vertebrae) in your neck. The halo is like a cast put on a broken arm.



How the Halo is Placed
There are two parts to the halo. The top part (halo ring) fits around your head. The halo ring is held in place by pins that fit into the bone in your head. The doctor will numb the areas in your head where the pins are placed. You will feel pressure while the pins are being placed. You may have some soreness for 1-3 days.

The halo ring is attached to the bottom part (halo vest). The vest fits over your chest. You will wear the halo vest next to your skin under your clothes.

It takes about 1 hour to have the halo placed. You will wear the halo for about 12 weeks.

Wearing the Halo
Your halo prevents unwanted motion in your neck. When you want to look in another direction, your head and trunk will turn as one. You will be able to do many normal activities by yourself. You may need some help with other activities from caregivers or from an assistive device. Ask your doctor for detailed guidelines and restrictions.

Caring for the Halo and My Skin
You can wipe off the halo structure using a cloth dampened with water. Follow the steps below to inspect your skin and wash under the halo vest every day.

1. Lie flat and turn onto your side.
2. Have someone help you loosen the straps on one side by your waist.
3. Inspect the skin under the vest.
4. Wash the area with plain water and dry the area completely before closing the lower straps.
5. Be sure to fasten the strap at your waist.
6. Roll to the opposite side and repeat.
7. **Do not** ever loosen the shoulder straps.
8. Check all areas where the vest touches your skin for redness or irritation.

Showering
During the time of your halo treatment, **do not** shower or get your halo vest wet. Sponge baths are advised. Clean your skin under the halo vest by carefully reaching under the vest with a lightly damp cloth. **Do not** loosen, change, or remove the halo vest. If your doctor lets you wash your hair, follow their exact instructions. **Do not** use conditioner, tints, dyes, or sprays on your hair.

Use a dry towel to "fluff and buff" your sheepskin. Slide the towel under your brace and pull it back and forth several times to fluff the sheepskin.

Do not use soap, lotion, or powder under the vest. It may irritate your skin.

Do not use sharp objects to scratch the skin under the vest.

Pin Site Care
Nursing staff will teach you how to keep the pin sites clean. You will need to clean them 2 times a day. Often, a crust will form around each site. This crust must be cleaned off to prevent infection. Your nurse will show you or a caregiver how to do this before you leave the hospital.

Steps for Cleaning Pin Sites

1. Wash hands well with soap and water.
2. In a small bowl, mix up antibacterial soap and water.
3. Dip a sterile cotton swab into the cleaning mixture. Vigorously clean one pin site. Be sure to remove any crust. Then, repeat for each pin site. **Always use a new, clean swab for each pin site. Start close to the pin and work away from it in a circular motion**.
4. Your doctor may want you to apply antibiotic ointment around the pin site. Use a small drop of ointment for each pin and use a new, sterile cotton swab to spread it around each pin. No gauze is needed.

Do not use ointments or antiseptics unless your doctor says to.

You can get more supplies on your return visits to the clinic. If you need more supplies but do not have a scheduled clinic visit, call the clinic.

Check the pin sites for signs of infection. Call your doctor right away if you notice:

- Red or inflamed pin sites
- Pus-like drainage (yellow-green)
- Shifting or movement of the pins
- Anything that becomes loose
- You are able to nod your head
- An open area around the pin sites
- Pain at pin sites
- Any clicking noises

Length of Halo
Your doctor will decide how long you need to wear your halo. **You cannot take off your halo.** You must wear your halo as ordered by your doctor. **Your halo cannot be removed, adjusted, or changed by anyone except your doctor.** If you lose or gain weight, the halo vest may need to be adjusted for proper fit. If you have any problems or concerns, you should contact your doctor right away.

The doctor will do x-rays to determine when your neck is healed. When it is healed, the doctor will remove the halo in the office. You can use band aids over the pin sites if you are going to be in a dirty area.

Your head will feel heavy on your shoulders after the halo is removed. The neck muscles have not had to work for several weeks. You may be fitted for a soft collar to help support your neck. Continue to limit your activities after the halo is removed. The doctor will tell you when you can be more active. It will take several weeks before you feel normal, but you will feel better each day.

Activities

- You can travel and fly in an airplane. The metal detectors will alarm when you pass through them.
- Depending on your job, you may or may not be able to work. Check with your doctor if you have questions or concerns.
- **Do not** lift heavy objects or jump or run.
- **Do not** ride a bike because your balance will be off.
- **Do not** drive a car.
- **Avoid** crowds of people where you might get shoved.
- If your neck hurts after any activity, stop and rest.
- Ask your doctor about sexual activity.

Going Home

You will need someone to drive you home from the hospital. You cannot drive while your halo is in place. Always wear your seat belt.

Bend at your hips, knees, and lower back when getting into and out of a car, and from sitting or standing.

Be very careful to allow extra space for the Halo structure when you move near other people or objects. In cold weather, you may want to limit your time outside. Wrap your head and halo with a small blanket or large towel to stay warm.

Sleep in any position that is comfortable. You may use a pillow or rolled towel under your neck for comfort.

You may feel more tired during the day, so short naps may help.

To get out of bed, roll over on your side near the edge of the bed. Drop your legs off the bed and push up with your arms and hands at the same time. **Do not allow anyone to pull or move you by pulling on the brace.**

In an Emergency

If cardiac arrest occurs, cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) can be done by releasing both side buckles and flipping the front of the vest.

Always keep the tools taped to the front of the vest. **Do not** remove the brace for any reason except an emergency. If you have any questions or problems, call the doctor.

When to Call

- Any numbness or tingling
- Pain
- Fever
- Less able to move or do everyday activities
- Continuing neck pain
- Any changes in the feeling in your arms or legs
- Any changes in moving your arms and legs
- Reddened or broken skin under or around the vest

Who to Call

Neurosurgery Clinic Patients
(608) 263-1410

Orthopedic Spine Clinic Patients
(608) 265-3207

After hours, nights, weekends, and holidays, this will give you the paging operator. Ask for the resident on call for your clinic. Leave your name and phone number with the area code. The doctor will call you back.

If you live out of the area, please call **1-800-323-8942** and ask for your clinic.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 6/2022. University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#6830