



Patient & Family Guide
2026

Your Halo Brace



www.nshealth.ca

Your Halo Brace

What is a halo brace?

- A halo brace is a device you wear to:
 - › Protect your neck while it heals (like a cast protects a broken arm or leg)
 - › Help your neck fracture heal properly
- You may need to make some changes in your lifestyle to prevent problems with your halo brace.



What is a halo vest?

- The halo brace is attached to a halo vest.
- The halo vest fits snugly. This is to make sure that your neck does not move.
- If your weight changes, the vest buckles may need to be adjusted. **Do not adjust the buckle notches yourself.**

Call your surgeon's office if you have painful areas on your:

- › Collarbones
- › Shoulder blades
- › Ribs
- › Spine

Your brace may need to be adjusted.

Balance and movement

- The halo brace weighs about 7 pounds.
- You will not be able to turn your head. You must learn to turn your whole body to see beside you.
- It may take about 1 week or longer to get used to your halo brace. This is common. **Do not** stop wearing your brace.
- You may have trouble balancing at first. **Take care not to fall.**

- Be patient and ask for help as needed. As you get used to your halo brace, you may become more independent.

Pain

- You may have a headache at first. This usually goes away after 3 to 4 days of wearing your halo brace.
- You can take acetaminophen (Tylenol®) for discomfort, as needed. Follow the package instructions.

Call your primary health care provider (family doctor or nurse practitioner) if:

- › The pain is constant (happening all the time)
- › The pain does not get better

Bathing

- **Do not** take a shower.
- You may take a tub bath.
 - › **Do not** use more than 4 to 6 inches of water
 - › Use a bath mat in the tub so you do not slip
- Wash yourself while sitting or lying down.
Do not wash yourself while standing.
- **To wash under your halo brace vest:**
 - › Only loosen 1 side at a time
 - › Loosen 1 buckle at a time
- **If you have changes in your balance or sensation (feeling):**
 - › You must bathe while lying down
 - › You must have someone help you wash and check your skin for redness and skin breakdown
- **If you do not have changes in your balance or sensation:**
 - › The safest way to bathe is sitting in a chair by a sink

- **Do not** get the vest or liner wet. If you do, use a blow dryer to dry it.
 - › Use a cool setting
 - › **Do not** get the blow dryer or the air too close to your skin
- **Do not** use powders or oil-based lotions. They can clump together and irritate your skin.

Washing your hair

- To keep the vest liner dry, put a towel through the bars of your halo brace and tuck it under your vest. Plastic wrap may help.
- Gently ease your hair through the top of the halo brace.
- To wet your hair, you can use:
 - › A spray attachment from a sink or tub
 - › A water pitcher
- Lean over the sink or tub. Have someone else wash your hair, then rinse it well.
- Towel dry your hair a little bit. Finish drying it with a blow dryer.

Shaving

- It may be hard to shave while you are wearing your halo brace.
- It is best to use a manual razor. Your halo brace post may get in the way of an electric razor.

Hair care

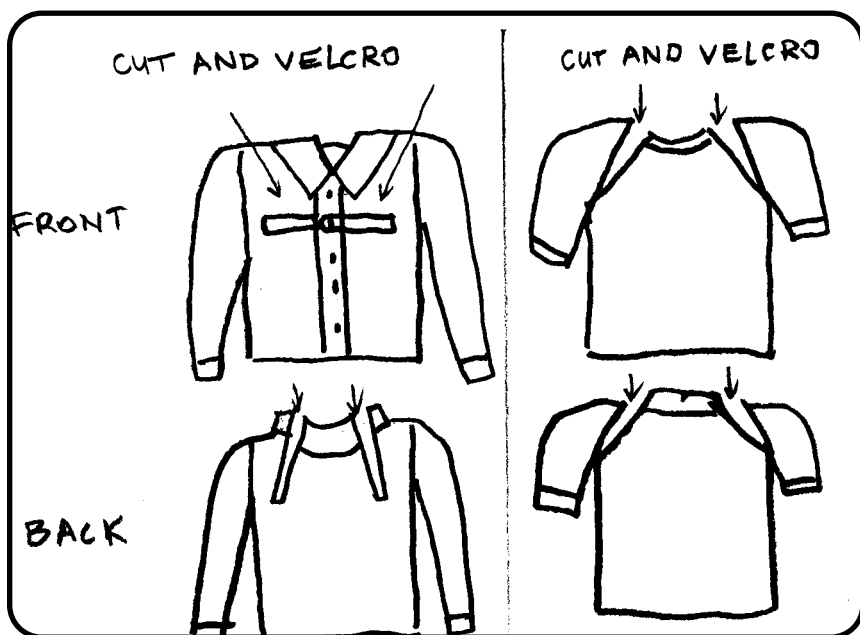
- **Do not:**
 - › Use hair dye
 - › Use a permanent wave solution (like a perm)

These could cause an infection at your pin sites (the places where the halo brace is attached to your body using pins)

- It will be hard to use a curling iron, so try other ways to style your hair.
- If you have dandruff, it may help to wash your hair often.
- **Do not** use dry shampoo. It may irritate your pin sites.

Clothes and shoes

- The best choices are:
 - › Loose-fitting shirts or V-neck sweatshirts
 - › Loose-fitting dresses
 - › Blouses with drawstring or zipper necks
 - › Low, flat shoes or boots. Shoes with heels or platforms can make it hard to balance.
- It may be easier to wear a bathing suit top that ties behind your neck instead of a bra.
- You can find sewing patterns for halo jackets and vests online or use these images as a guide to make your own:



Caring for your pin sites

- While you are in the hospital or Rehab, your health care team will care for your pin sites.
- Before you leave the hospital or Rehab, your nurse will show you how to care for your pin sites using a clean technique (see steps below).

How to care for your pin sites at home:

1. Wash your hands.
 2. Wet a cotton swab. You can use normal saline (salt water) or mild soap and water.
 3. Use the damp cotton swab to wash each pin site, as told by your doctor.
 4. **Do not** pick at scabs at the pin sites with your fingers or other objects.
 5. **Do not** use ointments or Polysporin® around the pin sites unless your doctor says it is OK.
- It is easier to clean the pins if the hair around them is cut short.
 - If you have pain, this may mean that your halo brace needs to be tightened. This should **only** be done by a qualified doctor (like a neurosurgeon or an orthopedic surgeon).

Call your surgeon's office if:

- › The area around a pin is swollen
- › The area around a pin is tender to touch
- › There is new discharge (fluid) around the pin sites

Do not adjust the halo brace pins or vest yourself. This should only be done by a qualified doctor.

Loose nuts and bolts

- **Do not adjust the nuts or bolts yourself.**
- If they need to be adjusted, call your surgeon's office. Your surgeon has the proper wrenches to adjust them.

Call your surgeon's office if:

- Your halo brace feels loose
- You have pain at the pin sites
 - › This may mean the pins are infected or loose and need to be adjusted
 - › The pin sites should **not** hurt after the first 3 to 4 days of wearing the halo brace

Do not adjust the nuts or bolts yourself.

Itchiness under the vest

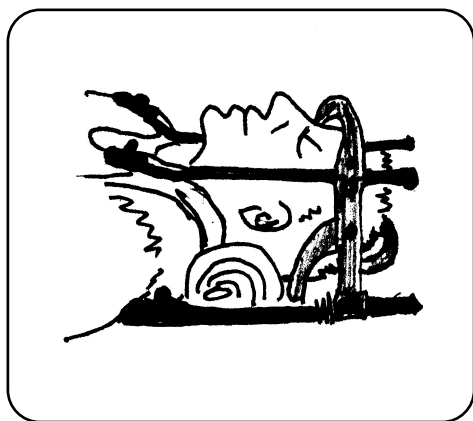
- When bathing, you can use a facecloth to help with itchiness. Reach under 1 side of the vest with the facecloth, then the other side.
- **Do not** use any objects to scratch the area.
- Try not to scratch so hard that you break your skin. Broken skin under the halo brace may cause problems.

Swallowing

- Always eat sitting up. It may be hard at first, but it will get easier.
- To help avoid choking on food and fluids:
 - › Cut food into small pieces
 - › Take smaller bites and sips
 - › Chew well
 - › Crush pills if they are hard to swallow
- **If you have problems opening your mouth, call your primary health care provider.**

Sleeping

- You may feel tired more quickly while you are wearing your halo brace. This is common. Have a nap if you are tired.
- It is OK to sleep on your back, side, or stomach. Sleep in the position you find the most comfortable.
- While lying on your back, you may feel more comfortable if you:
 - › Put a pillow under your knees
 - › Tuck a towel or a pillow in between the halo brace bars



- You may need help getting up from a sitting or a lying position. **Do not** let anyone pull on the halo brace bars while they are helping you.

Activities

- You may need to change your usual activities while you are wearing your halo brace. Avoid activities that put you at risk of moving your halo brace or falling.
- Ask your surgeon when you can go back to your usual activities, like work and driving.
- **You can:**
 - › Shop
 - › Eat at a restaurant
 - › Go to a movie
 - › Visit friends
 - › Have sex (**do not** pull or lean on the halo brace)
- **Do not:**
 - › Lift anything over _____ pounds
 - › Play sports
 - › Be in a crowd of people (if someone hits or moves your halo brace, the screws may get loose)
 - › Drink alcohol or use drugs to excess (get drunk or high)

Reading

- It may be hard to read because you cannot turn your head. Try using a music stand to hold your newspaper, book, or magazine. This will keep your arms from getting tired.

Driving

Do not drive a car while wearing your halo brace. This is very important.

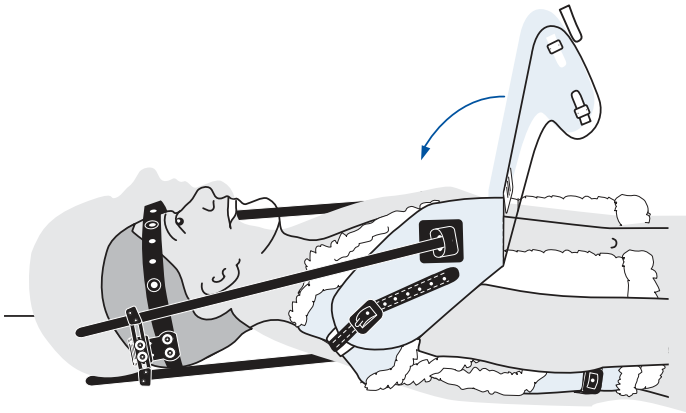
- It is OK to ride in a car as a passenger.
- **To get in a car:**
 - › Back in (bum first) to the car
 - › Slide across the seat until your head is through the door opening
 - › Turn your body to sit in the seat

How long will I need to wear my halo brace?

- People often need to wear a halo brace for 12 weeks (3 months) or longer. You will receive an appointment to see your surgeon in the clinic after being discharged home.
- **Your health care team will only remove your halo brace after an X-ray shows that your neck is healing properly.**

Emergency CPR

- If there is an emergency and you need to have **cardiopulmonary resuscitation** (CPR), make sure your loved ones and support persons know how to give CPR to a person in a halo brace.
 1. Make sure the person is lying on a flat, hard surface.
 2. Loosen the side waist buckles.
 3. Fold back the front part of the vest. There is a crease built into the vest. Fold the vest on the crease (see picture below).



4. Do CPR as needed.
- Once CPR has been done, the vest is no longer able to support the spine properly. It will need to be replaced.

Removing your halo brace

- It will take about 10 minutes to remove the halo brace. You may feel a very small amount of discomfort while it is being removed.
- You may be fitted with a collar after the brace is removed, if your surgeon says you need one.

This pamphlet is for educational purposes only. It is not intended to replace the advice or professional judgment of a health care provider. The information may not apply to all situations. If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.

Find all patient education resources here:
www.nshealth.ca/patient-education-resources

Connect with a registered nurse in Nova Scotia any time:
Call 811 or visit: <https://811.novascotia.ca>

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