



Patient & Family Guide
2021

Your Halo Brace



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Your Halo Brace

This pamphlet will help you learn about your halo brace.

What is a halo brace?

A halo brace is worn so that your neck fracture heals properly. This is similar to how a plaster cast protects a broken arm or leg while it is healing.

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. This is normal – do not get discouraged. You may have some trouble trying to balance yourself.

Take care not to fall at first. Over time, you may become independent, but until you are, ask for help. Be patient.

You will not be able to turn your head. You must learn to turn your whole body to see from side to side.

Hygiene

Bathing

- Loosen one buckle at a time to wash under the vest. Only do one side at a time. Wash yourself while sitting or lying, but never standing.
- People with altered balance or sensation must bathe while laying down and have someone to help wash and check their skin.
- For people with normal sensation and balance, the safest way to bathe is while sitting in a chair by the sink.
- Do not take a shower.

- You can take a tub bath in 4 to 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 it with a blow dryer on a cool setting. Do not get too close with the blow dryer.
- Do not use powders or oil-based lotions — they can cake and be irritating to your skin.

Shaving

Shaving can be very hard. It is best to use a manual razor, as the post may get in the way of an electric razor.

Washing your hair

- Thread a towel through the bars of the halo brace and tuck it under the vest to keep the liner dry. Plastic wrap may help.
- Gently ease your hair through the top of the halo brace.
- Use a spray attachment from the sink or bathtub, or a pitcher of water to wet your hair.
- Lean over the sink or bathtub and have someone else wash your hair.
- Wash your hair and rinse it well.

- Towel dry your hair slightly. Finish drying with a blow dryer.

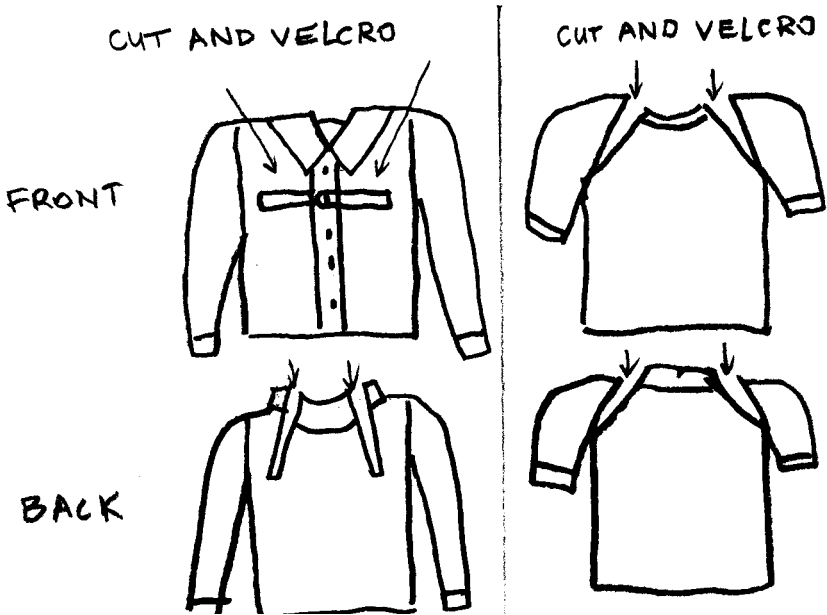
Hair care

- Do not use hair dye or permanent wave solution (a perm). These could cause an infection at the pin sites.
- Using a curling iron will be hard, so try different ways to style your hair.
- Dandruff may be a problem. Washing your hair often may help.
- **Do not use dry shampoo** as it may irritate your pin sites.

Best options for clothing and shoes

- › Large shirts or V-neck sweatshirts
- › Loose-fitting dresses
- › Blouses with drawstring or zipper necks
- › Flat-heeled shoes or boots — the sturdier the better
- It may be easier to wear a bathing suit top that ties behind your neck than a bra.

- You can find clothing patterns for Halo jackets and vests online or follow these images:



Pin sites care

- Your nurse will show you how to take care of the pin sites before you go home.
- The pin sites are cared for with a sterile technique during your stay in the hospital or Rehab.
- A clean technique can be used at home:
 - › Wash your hands.
 - › Dampen a cotton swab in normal saline (salt water) or use mild soap and water.

- › Wash each pin site. Do this as told by your doctor.
- › Do not pick at or remove scabs from the pin sites with your fingers or other objects.
- › Do not use ointments or Polysporin® around the pin sites unless your doctor says it is OK.
- If you have pain, this may mean that the halo needs to be tightened. This should be done only by a qualified doctor (such as a neurosurgeon or an orthopedic surgeon).
- It is easier to clean the pins if the hair around them is cut short.

Call your surgeon's office if:

- › The area around a pin is swollen
- › The area around a 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 doctor.

Halo vest

- The halo vest fits snugly to make sure that your neck is stable.
- The vest may need to be adjusted if your weight changes. **Do not change the buckle notches yourself.**

Call your surgeon's office 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 office if:

- › The brace feels loose. We have the needed wrenches to tighten the nuts and bolts.
- › The pins are painful. This may mean the pin is infected or loose and needs adjustment. Pins should not be painful after your initial headache has gone away (3 to 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 half of the vest at a time with a facecloth to help with itchiness. Do not use any objects 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 hard at first, but will get easier.
- Avoid choking on foods and fluids by:
 - › Cutting food into small pieces
 - › Taking smaller bites and sips of fluid
 - › Chewing well
 - › Crushing pills if they are hard to swallow

If you have any problems with opening your mouth, call your primary health care provider.

Riding in a car as a passenger

- You cannot drive a car with your halo brace.
- To get in a car: back in (bum first) and slide across the seat until your head has cleared the door opening, then turn your body.

Sleeping

- You may feel tired more quickly while you are wearing the brace — this is normal. If you are tired, have a nap.
- You may sleep on your back, side, or stomach. Sleep in the position you find the most comfortable.
- If you are laying on your back, it may feel comfortable to place a pillow under your knees.
- A towel or pillow tucked in between the bars may make your neck more comfortable.
- **If you need help getting up from a sitting or lying position, do not let anyone pull on the Halo bars.**



Reading

It may be hard to read since 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.

Pain

You can take acetaminophen (Tylenol®) for discomfort. If your pain is constant or does not get better, see your primary health care provider.

Activity while wearing a halo brace

You will likely need to change your activities while wearing the brace.

- Let common sense be your guide when deciding which activities are right for you.
- Be aware that people will look at you and your halo brace out of curiosity. Try not to let it bother you.

You can:

- › Shop.
- › Visit friends.
- › Eat out at restaurants.
- › Go back to sexual activity (sex) — do not pull or lean on the halo brace.
- › Go to the movies.

Avoid:

- › Sports.
- › Crowds — your halo brace may be jolted and the screws may become loose.
- › Overindulging in alcohol or using drugs.
- › Lifting anything over _____ pounds.

How long will I need to wear the halo brace?

The halo brace is often worn for 12 weeks or longer. You will be given an appointment to see your surgeon in the Clinic after you leave the hospital or Rehab.

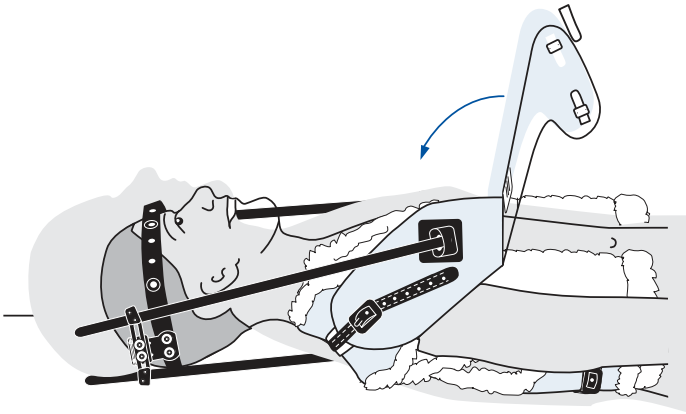
Halo brace removal

- Your halo brace will only be removed after an X-ray of your neck shows that it is healing as it should.
- It will take about 10 minutes to remove the halo brace and will cause very little discomfort.
- You may be fitted with a collar according to your surgeon's instructions.
- Check with your surgeon to see when you can go back to your usual activities, such as driving and going back to work.

Emergency

Make sure that your family and friends are aware of these instructions if you need CPR:

- Make sure the person is lying on a flat hard surface.
- Loosen the release on the side waist buckles.
- Fold back the front portion of the vest where there is a crease built into the vest.



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

Looking for more health information?

Find this pamphlet and all our patient resources here: <http://library.nshealth.ca/PatientEducation>

Contact your local public library for books, videos, magazines, and other resources.

For more information, go to <http://library.novascotia.ca>

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

Learn about other programs and services in your community: call 211 or visit <http://ns.211.ca>

Nova Scotia Health Authority promotes a smoke-free, vape-free, and scent-free environment.

Please do not use perfumed products. Thank you!

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The information is not intended to be and does not constitute **health care or medical advice.**

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The information in this pamphlet is to be updated every 3 years or as needed.