

Wearing a muzzle does not have to be a bad thing for a dog and wearing one certainly doesn't mean your dog is bad. Basket muzzles can be useful for a variety of different purposes, such as preventing your dog from picking up unhealthy or dangerous food items on walks. Basket muzzles should be the muzzle of choice for dogs visiting the veterinary clinic because they allow the dog to pant, eat, drink, and take treats while wearing it. This type of muzzle is also safer for a dog to wear for an extended period because it allows them to pant. Before using the basket muzzle your dog must be habituated to it in a very positive manner. Your dog should not just tolerate the muzzle, we want your dog to LOVE the muzzle, and this is not as difficult as you may think.

Help your dog see the muzzle as a great thing!

- Before beginning, make sure you have a variety of treats handy, especially anything that is gooey or can be licked, such as peanut butter, baby food or canned cheese. Test them first so you know which are your dog's favorites.
- Throughout the training process, always remember, *only good things happen when the muzzle appears!*

How to Begin

- You can begin by feeding your dog part of their daily meal in the muzzle. If your dog will not put their face into the muzzle with just kibble in it, then go straight to higher value treats such as peanut butter or cheese.
 1. Remove muzzle from cabinet and hold it up for the dog to see. Don't allow your dog to put their nose in the muzzle until you have added food.
 2. Place several kibbles (or other treats) in the bottom of the basket muzzle. Or go straight to the "good stuff" and smear peanut butter or cheese in the bottom of the muzzle.
 3. Offer the kibbles in the muzzle, when the dog finishes the kibble (or other treat) remove the muzzle and refill. Do not push the muzzle towards the dog's face. Allow them to place their face into the muzzle.
 4. Repeat several times per session. Try to practice for a few minutes at least once a day.
 5. Once the dog is excited and running to you when you pull out the muzzle, proceed to the next step.
 6. As dog is eating out of muzzle slowly raise the strap over the back of neck.
 - a. How far to raise the strap is determined by the dog's comfort level.
 - b. The goal is to raise the strap to the point that the dog does not move backward, stop eating or act uncomfortable or "resist" in any way.
 - c. Repeat each level several times before proceeding. Begin by just barely raising the strap, to laying it across the back of the neck.
 - a. 7. Once you have the strap laying across the back of the neck, then you will gently hold the end close to the buckle without actually buckling it. Repeat.
 8. Then slowly start to buckle the muzzle. Slip the holed edge into one side of the buckle, but do not buckle it- repeat
 9. Then put the strap through both sides of the buckle- repeat.
 10. Once the dog is comfortable allowing you to strap the muzzle on, feed squeeze cheese, Kong paste, or some other squeezable treat through the basket. The treat stops when the muzzle comes off. Repeat.

The steps above may take days to weeks. Do not rush them!

11. Practice putting the muzzle on at different times of the day for short periods of time.
12. By the time you are at step 10 you should not have to put kibble in the bottom to get the dog to want to put their nose in the muzzle. However if you are having difficulty buckling the strap, a little goo (kong paste, peanut butter, or squeeze cheese smeared on the bottom might make it easier for you and keep your dog happy).
13. Next work on duration or the length of time the dog has the muzzle on.
 - a. Gradually increase the length of time the muzzle is on. Treat intermittently while the dog is wearing the muzzle.
 - b. You do not want to keep the muzzle on until the dog fusses and tries to get it off.
 - i. If the dog fusses, ask for a different behavior (sit, down, come or some other trick the dog really enjoys) to redirect the fussing before removing the muzzle.
 - c. Ideally if you can see that the dog might fuss, redirect, and treat. This should occur before fussing.
 - d. If you use a clicker, this is an opportunity to click in response to calm behavior.
14. Once your dog is able to keep the muzzle on for a longer period of time, then add some distractions and distance.

Things to consider:

- It is important to avoid doing things that would require your dog wearing a muzzle for unpleasant things (medicating ears or going to the vet) until **after** the dog is trained to love the muzzle.
- Change your perception- think of the muzzle as a treat basket.
- Once your dog is wearing the basket muzzle comfortably, be sure to place the muzzle on the dog periodically during play or walks or just hanging out. You do not want to only put the muzzle on for things that the dog finds unpleasant. This will change the way your dog feels about the muzzle from a positive event to something that predicts bad things!
- Consider the muzzle as an added safety measure. It is there in case something goes terribly wrong, to prevent a tragic result. It is a bit like the airbag in your car, you don't drive more recklessly because you know it is there but you like having it (along with lap belts, shoulder harnesses and safety glass), just in case.
- The muzzle should never be used as an excuse to put your dog in situations that you would not expose them to when not wearing a muzzle!
- Always respect your dog's body language. If your dog acts uncomfortable, stop what you are doing immediately, try to determine what is concerning the dog and avoid doing that again in the future.
- For a video demonstrating this technique click on the following: