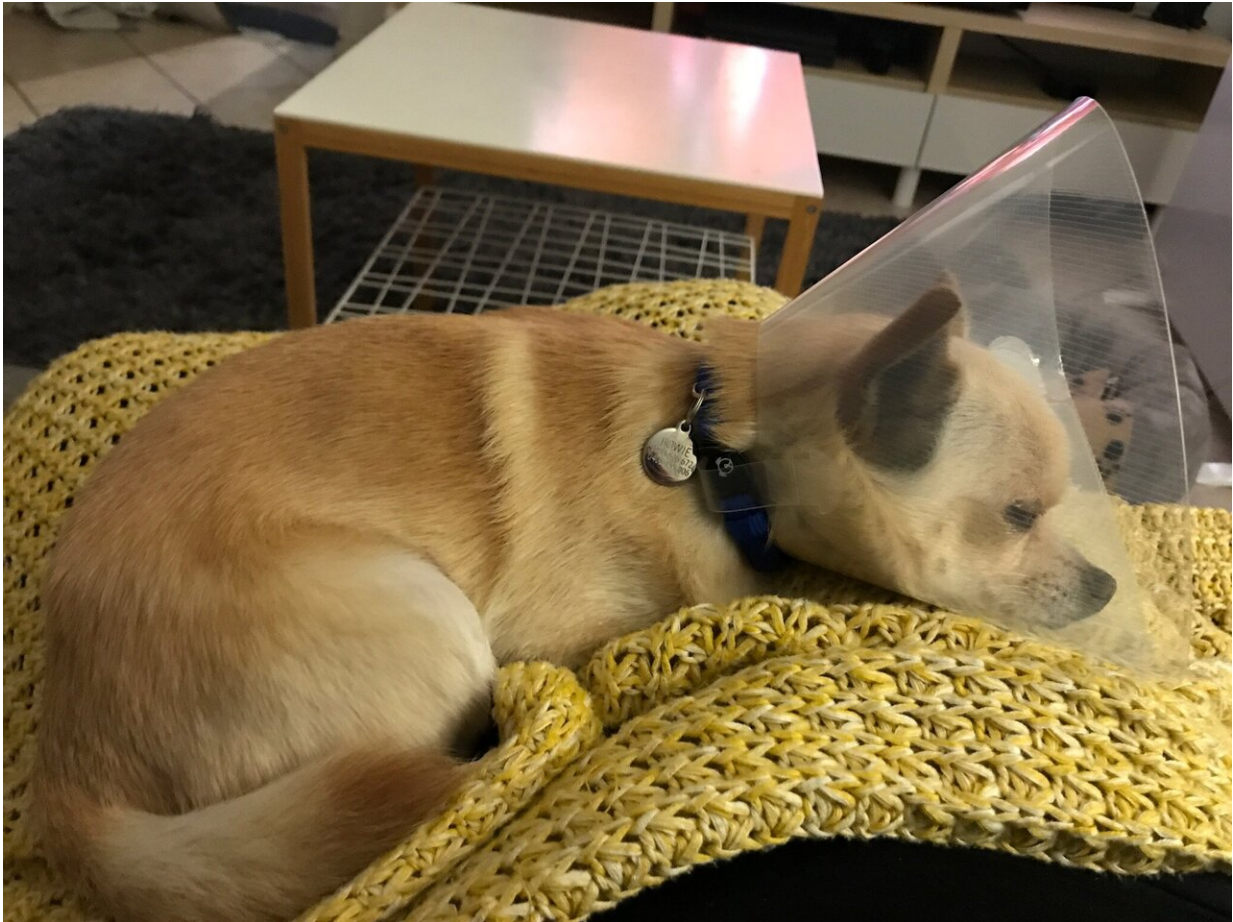


'Cone of shame' makes pets miserable

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Bowie, a chihuahua, after his surgery. Credit: University of Sydney

Dog and cat owners already know their companion animals seem to loathe the 'cone of shame' they are required to wear after surgery or when they have a sore or itchy spot. But very little research has been

done to assess the cone's impact on animal welfare.

Now a new study by researchers in the Sydney School of Veterinary Science at the University of Sydney has found the cone, or the "Elizabethan collar" as it's known in vet circles, does indeed impact on an animal's quality of life—owners, too.

The study, undertaken by Doctor of Veterinary Medicine student Yustina Shenoda and supervisors in the Sydney School of Veterinary Science, and published in the journal *Animals*, surveyed owners about the collar's impact on their pet's sleep, eating, drinking, exercise, interactions with other animals and overall quality of life.

Owners reported the collar interferes with drinking and playing and can cause injuries or irritation to the animal. It can also cause injuries to their owners and damage to property.

"Elizabethan collars are used to prevent self-trauma, especially after surgery, so they do play an important role," said study supervisor Dr. Anne Fawcett. "But we also learned that some animals suffer from misadventure, injury or irritation due to the collars themselves. Other casualties included furniture, buildings and the legs of owners when Elizabethan-collar wearing owners ran into them."

Cone of Shame problems

A global online survey, aimed at owners whose pets wore an Elizabethan collar during the past 12 months, was used to investigate the impact that these collars had on their animal's quality of life. Most of the respondents were from Australia, with others coming from the UK, U.S., New Zealand, South Africa, Ireland and Sweden.

The majority of the 434 respondents reported a worse quality of life

score when their companion animal was wearing the collar, significantly so when the Elizabethan collar irritated their pet or impacted on their ability to drink or play. Many owners were reluctant to keep the collar on due to changes in the animal's behaviour or mental health.

Problems for cats and dogs wearing the collars include:

- Difficulty drinking (60.2 percent)
- Inability to play (67.5 percent)
- Collar-related injuries, including itching/irritation, bumping into walls, falling downstairs and [psychological distress](#) (25 percent)
- Other problems, including difficulty toileting, grooming, being fitted for a harness or lead, getting through dog or cat door, sleeping in a crate, navigating indoors "without smashing into doorways, tables or chairs" (10 percent)

"Our study found that Elizabethan collars had the potential to cause distress in animals, which in turn caused distress to owners," Dr. Fawcett said. "Some animals found ingenious ways to remove the collars themselves, for example running under furniture at speed, but damaged or poorly fitted Elizabethan collars could increase the risk of injury to animals."

Owners have their say

"My dog is a bulldog and his neck got very wet and inflamed from slobbering constantly with it on. He got very down with it on and seemed depressed. Maybe the shape of it was not good for him," said one dog owner in the study.

"...in our case, it was 22 inches of snow that made it impossible for him to move outside without have the snow fill the collar," said a dog owner in Europe.

"Made the cat thoroughly miserable but he had licked himself a huge ulcer and the collar was the only way to get it healed. The collar interfered with virtually all aspects of his life, he hated it but fortunately was too stupid to figure-out how to get it off," reported one cat owner.

"The Elizabethan collar was also aversive to me. My shins were so bruised from him banging into me causing less interactions with us," a pet owner said.

"I have sustained a lot of damage to doors and plasterwork over the years as a result of the collars," said the owner of a dog.

Recommendations

The study recommends exploring alternative methods to Elizabethan collars to minimise negative welfare impacts including self-trauma, injury or misadventure, such as:

- Inflatable collars, neck restraints, visors, muzzles, socks or booties, body wraps or clothing.
- Anti-itching medication, pain killers, topical anaesthetics or sedatives.

"We also recommend that members of veterinary teams advise pet owners about the potential negative effects of the collar, including the potential for discomfort or injury," said Yustina Shenoda. "At a minimum we recommend giving owners tips around assisting their animals with drinking and eating, and encouraging owners to monitor their pets when wearing them. This advice could be provided verbally or through a brochure that clients can take home."

What is an Elizabethan collar?

Named after the lace collars or ruffs that were fashionable at the time of Queen Elizabeth I, the collar is routinely recommended by veterinarians to prevent animals from removing their stitches after surgery. The collar is designed to prevent the animal from reaching their body with their mouths, and to protect the head, eyes, face and neck from being scratched by the limbs.

The rigid plastic collars are most commonly used on dogs and cats, but can also be used on birds, small mammals and rodents.

Why use a collar?

There are many valid reasons for using the collar. Animals might lick, bite, chew or scratch a surgery area or sore spot causing inflammation, abrasion and potential secondary infection. Elizabethan collars are primarily used in veterinary clinical settings post-operatively to prevent suture removal or as a method to prevent self-trauma, including removal of devices such as catheters or bandages. The collars may also break the itch-lick cycle in [animals](#) with skin disease and they help control excessive oral grooming in cats.

More information: Yustina Shenoda et al. "The Cone of Shame": Welfare Implications of Elizabethan Collar Use on Dogs and Cats as Reported by their Owners, *Animals* (2020). [DOI: 10.3390/ani10020333](https://doi.org/10.3390/ani10020333)

Provided by University of Sydney

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