Philadelphia collar management at home

Summary Points to Remember
- The collar is used to support your neck bones and ligaments, and to prevent further injury.
- The collar should remain on at all times until advised by your doctor.
- You may require some assistance to change the collar.
- It is advised you change the collar at least once a day after a shower.

What is a Philadelphia collar?
It is a cervical collar with two pieces. It has a front piece and a back piece and is held together by velcro straps. The collar is used to support your neck bones and ligaments and assists in reducing any movement while healing is taking place.

When do I wear the collar?
The collar must be worn at all times while your injury heals, including in the shower. Your doctor will let you know when it is no longer required.

Driving
It is strongly advised that you do not drive whilst wearing a philadelphia collar as it is extremely dangerous. The philadelphia collar combined with your neck injury restricts your vision, making it unsafe to drive. If you do drive you may not be covered by any insurance policies.

Sleeping
It is recommended you sleep either on your back or side with a small pillow behind your neck and head.

Walking and activities
When walking you may have difficulty looking down. Caution should be taken when there are stairs or uneven surfaces, ensure you hold the handrail when walking down stairs. It is also recommended that you wear non slip, flat shoes and to remove any mats or rugs at home to avoid slipping or tripping over. Avoid strenuous activities that may include lifting and bending using your arms as this can strain your neck.

Eating and drinking
You may find that eating and drinking can be difficult at first as you will have difficulty looking down at your plate or tilting your head back to drink. Try and hold your plate close to your mouth to avoid any spills and use a straw to drink.

Showering
You will be sent home with two collars and two sets of liners. Wear one collar without liners in the shower and change it over with the second dry collar when you have finished. You can change the collar on your own; however, you may find it helpful to have another person to assist you. If you are on your own, it is best to change the collar in front of a mirror either standing up or sitting with your feet flat on the floor so you can see the correct placement and keep your neck still.

Ensure that you keep your head very still when you remove the wet collar. Dry your neck and reapply a dry collar (see instructions on the next page). It is advised that men should shave daily after showering while the collar is off. You will need assistance with this as you need to keep your head very still.
Prior to changing your collar with or without assistance, ensure you prepare all the equipment that you will need, including a dry clean collar with the liners on and a towel (for neck drying) +/- shaving equipment.

**Changing the collar at home with an assistant**

1. Remove the wet collar and remain very still looking straight ahead, ensure you are holding the front piece ready for application.
2. Clean and dry your neck before placing the new collar.
3. Have your assistant stand behind you and place the back piece of the collar to the back of your neck. Ensure that this is centred and fits under your ears.
4. Whilst the assistant holds the back piece you can put the front piece in place.
5. Ensure that your chin is sitting in the chin piece; the front piece is overlapping the back piece exposing maximal velcro.
6. Ensure the collar is centred and the velcro straps are applied firmly securing the collar together.

**Changing the collar at home without an assistant**

1. Ensure your equipment is assembled and within easy reach as this is more important when changing the collar alone.
2. Remove the old collar and remain very still looking straight ahead, dry your neck.
3. Place the back piece on your neck and hold it whilst you pick up the front piece and apply; ensure it overlaps the back and it’s centred and secured with the velcro straps.
Checking the collar is fitted correctly

Check the following
1. chin is resting on the chin support
2. collar is sitting below your ears
3. collar is centred
4. the front piece is overlapping the back piece
5. the velcro straps are secured firmly and evenly

Cleaning the collar

After completing the collar change, wash and dry the removed collar and liners so they are ready for use after your next shower. Do not dry the collar with a heater or hair dryer.

The liners can be removed from the collar and put into the washing machine or collar and liners can be cleaned with warm soapy water.

Wearing problems

The most common problem is skin irritations, rashes and skin breakdown.

To prevent this from happening it’s important that you check your chin, collarbone and breastbone daily for any signs of redness or irritation. Men should shave daily to prevent stubble irritation.

Skin irritations, rashes and breakdown can be caused if the collar is not fitted correctly or when sweat builds up in the foam of the collar. This is why we recommend regular collar changes; skin hygiene and using the collar liners and regular washing of the collar.

CAUTION: Talcum or substitute powders and creams should not be used on skin underneath a collar as they can worsen irritations and breakdown.

When to contact your doctor or orthotist?

You should contact your local GP or hospital orthotist if you think the collar is not fitting correctly or if you have any breaking skin on your chin, collarbone, and breastbone or back of your head.

Links and references

The Royal Melbourne Hospital, (2015), Trauma Service, Trauma Guidelines; Cervical Spine.
The Royal Melbourne Hospital, (2008), Physiotherapy department, Patient education, Philli collar patient information.