

INFORMATION FOR PARENTS & CARERS OF A CHILD WITH A HALO VEST SYSTEM



What is a Halo Vest System?

The Halo Vest System, is a brace which stops you moving and places tension on your neck bones, which allows broken or dislocated bones to heal and helps prevent further damage to your spinal column.

The equipment used for Halo Vest System is made up of three parts:

1. A ring around the head, which is attached to the skull with pins, is known as the Halo
2. A Special Vest with a sheepskin lining
3. A set of four rods and two blocks, which connect the head ring to the special vest.

The Halo Vest System equipment is made from material that is strong and light so it is easy for you to move around.

Why do I need a Halo Vest System?

Your child may have had a recent neck injury or spinal surgery and because of this, they need to be in the Halo Vest System for a period of time in order to protect the bones from any damaging movement.

The Halo vest system provides stability for a period of time to allow the fusion to heal

The Halo Vest System is fitted in theatre. The Halo part of the equipment will be fitted to your child's skull using pins that are placed through the skin directly into the skull (local anaesthetic is used to numb the area prior to pin insertion). The Special Vest; the rods will be connected to the blocks to form the complete Halo Vest System.

Are there any alternatives to having a Halo Vest System?

This depends on the extent of your injury. Where possible, if your neck can be held in place by a neck collar, this is what the doctors will suggest. However, there are some circumstances in which Halo Vest System offers the best results.

Can there be any complications or risks?

Are there any risks?

Bumps and knocks to the Halo Vest System can be painful and traumatic and vigorous activity is best avoided.

Trouble shooting – you should call the hospital if:

- Your child experiences a noticeable increase in pain in either their neck or limbs
- The pin sites ooze, bleed or show sign of infection
- The pins become loose or you notice the vest clicking on movement

What happens afterwards?

Following application of the Halo Vest System your child will be visited by the Physiotherapist and Occupational Therapist. They will help you to get used to the traction equipment. There are special ways of moving about, getting up or sitting down while wearing the Halo Vest System, and the therapists will show you how to do these things. At **no** time must anyone help your child move by pulling on the metal rods that join the Halo ring and the Vest System, as this will cause tension on the skull pins.



Pin Tightening

The pins will initially be tightened by the Orthopaedic team at 24 hours post application. Your child will need to visit the hospital regularly following discharge for review of the halo vest system by the nurse specialist and team.

Your doctor will decide the length of time you will be expected to wear the Halo Vest System and this will be discussed with you while in hospital.

If you notice the pins become loose, you should inform the team immediately.

There is a bag attached to each halo kit which needs to stay with the patient as it contains an Allen key which may be needed to remove the vest system in an emergency

GENERAL ADVICE AND CARING FOR YOUR HALO AT HOME



Diet and Eating

At first, the sensation of swallowing may feel different as your child will be unable to move your neck and it may take a little time for them to adjust.

Vest Care

The sheepskin vest should be kept dry at all times. If it gets wet, dry it with a hairdryer on a cool setting. You should never try to remove the sheepskin from inside the jacket. **Please do not make any modifications to the vest yourself.**

Skin Care

Skin care underneath the sheepskin is difficult. Your child will not be able to have a bath or a shower, but areas that you can reach should be washed and dried every day. Use water only – do not use any soap, oil or powder. Your specialist nurse will give you specific advice on how to do this.



Hair Washing

This can also be difficult. The best way is to lay on a flat surface (bed) and extend your child head over the edge taking care to cover the vest with towels/plastic. Hair can then be washed as normal over a bucket, taking care not to bump the pins as this may cause discomfort.

Pin Site Care

If the pin sites are oozing or painful or the pins are loose, please contact the team directly. Try to avoid touching the pin sites throughout the day to prevent infection. The pin sites should be cleaned daily with cooled boiled water.



Clothing

The Halo Vest System is worn next to your skin so you may find big, baggy clothes with buttons or zips are easier to wear over the Halo Vest System. Always wear low heeled shoes with good grip to avoid slips and falls. Your specialist nurse will be happy to give you specific advice on adapting clothing.



Sleeping

It will take time to adjust sleeping with the Halo Vest System on. Your child may use pillows to help support him or her if it is comfortable. Using a rolled towel under your neck will also give the feeling your child's neck is supported and may help with comfort.

If someone is helping your child sit up, remember do not let them pull up on the bars.



Getting on with life

Despite initial feelings of awkwardness, it is important to remain as active as possible. Your child may feel more tired initially; however, this will improve as time goes on. Your child should be able to attend school however should not take part in PE, games, swimming or any high energy activities. The Spinal Dept. can provide a letter with the necessary information regarding the Halo device. If your child is receiving any unwanted attention, please contact the Spinal Dept. and the psychologist may suggest some helpful strategies for dealing with this. Honest explanations when your child returns to school wearing the equipment can ease fears felt by other children and adults.



Travelling

Your child may be unsteady and they may take time to adjust to the halo vest system equipment. The physiotherapist will help them adjust while in hospital. When travelling by car, ensure the passenger seat is set back. It may be easier for your child to enter the vehicle with your body bent forward and sit down, then swing your legs round. Your physiotherapist can go through this with you on the ward if required.

Removal of the Halo Vest System

Your child will need to come back into the hospital in order to have the Halo Vest taken off. Your child will have a scan or X-rays to check that healing is satisfactory before it is removed.

The actual removal of the Halo Vest System is a simple procedure that should take about 10 minutes. It is not a painful experience and will be removed under a short general anaesthetic in the day ward. Your child may need to wear a neck collar for a few weeks. Their neck may feel weak because the muscle has not been used as normal while the Halo vest system equipment was fitted. A physiotherapist appointment will be available if required to help with strengthening exercises can be done at home.

Please bring with you clothes to dress your upper body after removal of the Halo Vest System.

If you have any further questions, please contact the Spinal team at CHI at Crumlin

St Joseph's Ward: 01 409 6049

Contact: Spinal CNSp Phone: 01 409 6024

Monday – Friday 10:00 - 12:00pm

Email: spinal.disorders@olchc.ie

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