

THE RETRACTABLE LEASH: PROS AND CONS

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Regardless of the type of leash you choose to work with, let's review a few basics of responsible dog ownership/guardianship that you should follow when you and your beloved pooch are out in public:

- You need to be your dog's leader and have control of her in public. If Gracie is pulling on the line rather than walking politely, who's leading whom?
- You should be able to read your dog's body language so as to anticipate any sudden changes in his comfort level. If you're 15 or 20 feet behind Casey, that's virtually impossible to do.
- All dogs do not like all other dogs. Anyone who tells you, "Oh, my dog just loves other dogs!" is naïve. Just as you can't be expected to like every single person you meet, your dog shouldn't be expected to like every dog she encounters.

With this in mind, let's take a look at the some of the advantages and disadvantages of retractable leashes.

The "Pros".

- For you: the solid, comfortable handle and the push-button "braking" system
- For your dog: the freedom of having 20+ feet of line to run on in a safe, open space

The "Cons".

- Your dog suddenly decides to dart ahead (at the sight of a squirrel, maybe?) Since she is often faster and sometimes stronger than you are, she might catch you off guard, causing you to drop that solid, comfortable handle. Now you have a dog that is both frighteningly off leash AND dragging behind her a clunky, noisy object that is freaking her out because she thinks it's "chasing" her!
- You've let the line out 20 feet and suddenly realize that you're heading toward an on-coming, unfriendly dog or a busy intersection. You have only seconds to rein in Chauncey, but how? You have no control whatsoever and your dog is now in physical danger. Plus, if you've ever tried reeling in a charging 90- or 50- or even 20- pound dog by hand with that thin nylon line, you know that the resulting skin burns and/or cuts can be nasty.
- Regarding the freedom your dog enjoys on a retractable leash: Whether she's on a 6-foot lead or a 26-foot lead, she's still going to hit the end of it at some point. That's not freedom. And as the leader, you are responsible for controlling your dog's behavior. If she runs into another dog's "personal space" and a fight ensues, how free is she then – free enough to be mauled? If she runs into traffic and is hit by a car, how free is she then? And where is the responsible handler?

At the end of the day, a retractable leash can be enjoyable IF your dog is well behaved, is under your control and is in a safe area with you that allows lots of room to move about. Used inappropriately, it can put you and your pooch at considerable risk. For walks in busy areas, and for any obedience training you may be doing, a 5- or 6-foot nylon or leather leash is recommended.

