

CANINE BLOAT

Bloat is a condition affecting primarily the large breed dogs in which the stomach simply fills with air. Most common breeds are Great Danes, Irish Setters, German Shepherds, Afghans, and Rhodesian Ridgebacks. This condition may progress to include “volvulus” which means the stomach has twisted on its longitudinal axis. Both of these conditions are *emergency conditions!*

CAUSES of this condition are really not understood. One theory is that if the dog ate a large amount of dry food followed by ingestion of large amounts of water, the dry food then swells. If strenuous exercise is exerted with the stomach this full, the resulting running and jumping causes the heavy stomach to twist from the excessive movement.

The most current theory is that the stomach’s regular contractions during the process of digestion lose their regular rhythm and traps air in the stomach that does not pass on down into the intestine. As the stomach pressure increases, the dog is unable to “belch” off the gas.

SIGNS of bloat include depression, pain, inability to get comfortable, and a protrusion most prominent on the left side of the dog in the area of the stomach. The dog often will lie in the “praying position,” with the front legs drawn fully forward.

RADIOGRAPHS are needed to determine if the stomach has twisted (volvulus).

CAUSES OF CONCERN.

1. Shock resulting from the distended stomach putting pressure on the large veins of the abdomen obstructing proper return of blood to the heart. This decreases heart output and results in poor blood and oxygen supply.
2. Stomach wall does not get proper blood circulation due to shock and pressure on the stomach wall blood vessels from the distention. If adequate blood flow is not returned quickly to the stomach wall, the stomach wall begins to die and may even rupture.
3. Spleen blood supply is interrupted if the stomach twists causing a rotation of the spleen and its vessels.
4. Digestion stops when bloat occurs. That allows the accumulation of toxins in the intestinal tract that activates chemicals causing inflammation. Toxins are also absorbed into the blood circulation.

TREATMENT OF BLOAT:

1. Treat shock with IV fluids & “shock” drugs.
2. Relieve stomach pressure via stomach tube and/or surgery.
3. Return the stomach to its proper position if twisted.
4. Remove devitalized stomach wall by surgery.
5. Attach stomach to abdominal wall (gastropexy) to prevent recurrence.
6. Monitor & treat for heart rhythm abnormalities (arrhythmias) which commonly occur for several days after bloating occurs.

PROGNOSIS. Survival rate depends on severity of distention, amount of time before treatment, and degree of shock present. Approximately 60-70% of dogs will survive when very aggressive therapy is initiated quickly.