

GASTRIC DILATION & VOLVULUS

GASTRIC DILATION & VOLVULUS (GDV), commonly called “bloat,” is a potentially fatal condition in which a dog’s stomach distends with gas, food, and fluid—and then possibly rotates or “twists.” This twisting blocks both the entrances to the stomach from the esophagus and the exit into the intestines. It also shuts off the blood supply to the stomach and other internal organs. Distention and twisting may occur separately or together. When the condition occurs, every minute before treatment is initiated is critical in determining the dog’s chances of survival.

The condition is more common in older, purebred dogs. The deep-chested breeds such as Great Danes, Irish Setters, and Saint Bernards have the highest incidence. The deep, narrow chest provides a greater opportunity for the ligaments that support the stomach to stretch, especially when the stomach is full.

SIGNS. If a dog with this condition could talk, he would complain of abdominal pain, nausea, and weakness. But our canine friends can’t verbalize this information, and therefore owners have to look for clinical signs. *If your dog exhibits one or more of the following conditions or behaviors—especially within a few hours of eating, call your veterinarian without delay:*

1. Abdominal swelling and tenderness
2. Unsuccessful attempts to vomit (retching)
3. Excessive drooling
4. Restlessness or frequent change of position, often accompanied by whining
5. Panting or labored breathing
6. Staring at the abdomen, sometimes with a look of confusion or distress

TREATMENT. Minutes matter. Prompt treatment is essential for survival. Treatment may involve only removing the gas, washing out the stomach, and then close monitoring for a period of time to be sure it does not recur. In cases where there is a possible “twist,” emergency surgery is required. Surgery survival rate is not 100%, but it is the only chance the dog has. The earlier surgical intervention is initiated, the more likely a successful outcome. Once the abdomen is opened, it is possible to evaluate the stomach wall and other organs to better estimate the chances for survival.

REDUCE THE RISK. Even though there are no sure-fire ways to prevent these conditions, the following recommendations may help avoid it:

1. Feed your dog 2-3 *small meals/day* instead of one large meal.
2. *Gradually introduce any dietary changes* over a period of several days.
3. *Moisten dry food with water* so the food expands **BEFORE** it is eaten.
4. *Avoid feeding table scraps or “people food.”*
5. *Do NOT vigorously exercise your dog for at least one hour before meals and two hours after eating.*
6. Don’t allow your dog to eat **large quantities of food rapidly.**
7. Don’t allow your dog to drink **large amounts of water** before or after meals.
8. If possible, observe your dog for the first signs of distress for *1-2 hours after eating.*
9. Be especially watchful when your dog is under stress, such as being kenneled, hospitalized, or in training.