

Gastric dilation and volvulus (GDV) is one of the most serious life-threatening emergencies that we encounter in dogs. It is important as an owner to be aware of signs of GDV, and to act quickly, as seeking immediate veterinary attention could be life-saving for your pet.

What is a GDV?

In the early stages the stomach fills with gas and becomes 'bloated', the gas and/or food then stretches the stomach to many times its normal size, causing severe abdominal pain. For reasons we do not fully understand, this distended stomach then tends to rotate, this cuts off the only exit routes for the gas inside the stomach and results in squashing of some of the major blood vessels in the abdomen which reduces blood flow to the stomach and the heart. The spleen, that sits nearby to the stomach, can also become twisted when the stomach rotates. The stretching of the stomach wall also puts pressure on the lungs, making it difficult for the dog to breathe and as the stomach wall stretches it starts to leak bacteria into the bloodstream which can cause sepsis (blood poisoning).

Not only is this extremely painful, but it is also rapidly life-threatening. A dog with a bloated, twisted stomach will die in pain in a matter of hours unless drastic steps are taken.

What dogs are at risk?

Large deep chested dogs are more likely to develop bloat. Examples of such breeds are Great Danes, Doberman Pinchers, and the Setter breeds. However, any breed can develop a GDV. Studies suggest that dogs weighing over 45kg have a 20% chance of developing GDV and for Great Danes there is a 42% chance. The risk of developing the condition increases with age, but it can affect dogs of any age. The risk of developing bloat is increased when a dog eats a large meal and exercised heavily shortly afterwards.

What are the signs of GDV:

- Dog is distressed and makes multiple attempts to vomit that are frequently unproductive
- Upper abdomen is hard and distended from the gas within (though in a well-muscled or overweight dog, the distention may not be obvious) If there is any doubt call your vet.
- Restlessness & pacing
- Collapse
- Difficulty breathing

If a GDV is suspected, abdominal x-rays will be required to investigate. Once the condition is confirmed, there are several life saving steps that will need to be carried out, including emergency surgery to correct the twisted stomach and fixing the stomach to the abdominal wall to reduce recurrence. Sadly, this condition carries a 17-38% mortality rate despite corrective surgery. However, the mortality rate when not treating a gastric dilation and torsion is 100%, so seeking prompt veterinary treatment is vital.

Prevention:

Gastropexy Surgery is an elective surgery usually done at the time of neutering in a breed considered at risk and can be done via a keyhole procedure. This dramatically reduces the risk of the stomach twisting. Please contact us if