

Bloat in Dogs

This is a term that is synonymous with the more scientific term "Gastric Dilatation/Volvulus." It is often called GDV. In this condition, the dog's stomach distends with gas to the point that the dog goes into shock and may die. Often, the stomach twists and normal outflow from the stomach is obstructed, causing it to distend even more.

Prevalence

This condition almost always occurs in adult, deep chested dogs of large and giant breeds. Some of the more commonly affected breeds include Great Danes, Irish Setters, German Shepherds, and Afghan Hounds.

Causes/Transmission

Even after extensive study, we still do not know the cause of GDV. In all likelihood, there are multiple causes. The most current theory is that the stomach's contractions lose their regular rhythm and trap air in the stomach; this can cause the twisting event. However, the sequence of events for most cases defies a good explanation.

Clinical Signs

An enlarged stomach will cause the abdominal wall to protrude prominently, especially on the dog's left side. In most cases, the owner is able to detect the distention, although in some cases (especially in obese dogs), it can only be detected by a veterinarian manipulating the abdomen. The dog will be very restless, painful, or very depressed. Vomiting will progress to nonproductive retching (dry heaves). This sequence of events occurs relatively quickly, over two or three hours in most cases.

Diagnosis

The first step is to establish that the stomach is distended with air.

The presence of a rapidly developing distended abdomen in a large breed dog usually provides adequate evidence to render a tentative diagnosis of GDV. A radiograph (x-ray) is used to confirm the diagnosis of dilatation (distension). It can also identify the presence of volvulus (twisting of the stomach), in most cases.

Treatment

This is a medical emergency and the dog must go to the veterinarian at once. If the stomach is twisted for too long, the tissue will start to die, causing a very poor prognosis.

At the veterinarian, several important steps must be taken quickly.

1. Shock must be treated with administration of large quantities of intravenous fluids. They must be given quickly; some dogs require more than one intravenous catheter.

2. Pressure must be removed from within the stomach (gastric decompression), either with an oral tube or a needle through the skin
3. The stomach must be returned to its proper position. This requires abdominal surgery that can be risky because of the dog's condition.
4. The stomach will be attached to the abdominal wall (gastropexy) to minimize the possibility of recurrence of GDV. Although this is not always successful, this procedure greatly reduces the likelihood of recurrence.
5. Abnormalities in the rhythm of the heart (arrhythmias) must be diagnosed and treated. Severe arrhythmias can become life threatening at the time of surgery and for several days post-operatively.

Prognosis

The prognosis is guarded. Early intervention improves the likelihood of a good outcome. Other factors related to survival include the severity and duration of the distention, the degree of shock, how quickly treatment is begun, presence of infection, and the presence of other diseases, especially those involving the heart. Dogs who survive the surgery and immediate post-operative period have a good prognosis.

Prevention

The most effective means of prevention is gastropexy, or the surgical attachment of the stomach to the body wall. This will not prevent dilatation (bloat), but it will prevent volvulus in most cases. Often, this is done at the time of a spay (in the female dog), or it can be done during a neuter (in the male)