

Gastric Dilatation–Volvulus

- Gastric dilation–volvulus (GDV), or “bloat,” is a life-threatening condition in which the stomach fills with air and becomes twisted.
- GDV can occur in any breed of dog, but it is more commonly seen in larger-breed dogs with deep chests.
- Dogs weighing 100 pounds or more have a 20% chance of this condition.
- One study showed that Great Danes, St. Bernards, and Weimaraners were the breeds most commonly affected.

What Is It?

Gastric dilation–volvulus (GDV), or “bloat,” is a life-threatening condition in which a dog’s stomach fills with air and becomes twisted. Gas builds up in the twisted stomach and stretches it. This stretching, also called distention, is extremely painful and limits the amount of blood that can reach other parts of the body. When blood can’t reach body tissues to supply oxygen, those tissues can die. GDV is an emergency situation, and if not treated immediately, it can be fatal. While any size or breed of dog can develop this condition, it is more common in larger-breed dogs with deep chests, like German shepherds, golden retrievers, and Great Danes.

Signs of Gastric Dilatation–Volvulus

A dog with GDV may be found collapsed and in severe pain. The dog may try unsuccessfully to vomit and may have a very swollen belly. Dogs with GDV are in extreme pain, so they may whine, grunt, appear distressed, or stand with an arched back. Other signs include:

- Drooling
- Frequent retching
- Anxiousness, restlessness, and pacing
- Lethargy (tiredness)
- Depression
- Vocalizing (sign of pain)
- Arched back (sign of pain)

Diagnosis

GDV is usually diagnosed based on a combination of physical examination findings and radiographs (x-rays). A dog with GDV will have an enlarged abdominal area that is painful to the slightest touch. Your veterinarian will also look for signs of shock, such as weakness, pale gums, and severe depression. Your veterinarian may take abdominal x-rays to evaluate the position of the stomach. On the x-ray, the stomach will appear full of gas and in an unusual position. X-rays are normally taken only after the patient is stabilized. The longer the pet is in distress, the more likely it is to die or have complications.

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Treatment

GDV is an emergency condition and must be treated by a veterinarian immediately. At the hospital, the veterinarian will take steps to gently decompress the stomach and relieve the bloating. Dogs with GDV may be in shock and great pain. The veterinary team will make every effort to stabilize the patient as much as possible. This may include intravenous fluids and pain medication. The patient may require emergency surgery to correct the twisted stomach and check for any internal damage. Sometimes, the twisting of the stomach damages the spleen, intestines, and other nearby organs.

Once the dog’s stomach is untwisted and repaired, the surgeon usually performs a surgical procedure called a gastropexy. In this surgery, the stomach is returned to its normal position and attached to the inside of the abdominal wall, which helps prevent it from twisting again. A gastropexy is very important, since the chance of GDV happening again is extremely high.

Common Conditions

Prevention

In breeds with a high risk of GDV, veterinarians often recommend performing gastropexy as a preventive measure. A surgeon may perform this surgery when the dog is being spayed or neutered as a puppy. Recent advances in surgery have allowed veterinarians to perform this surgery through laparoscopy. A laparoscope is a surgical device attached to a long tube (called an *endoscope*) that has a tiny camera at the tip. This device is inserted into the patient's abdomen through a very

small incision, and the entire gastropexy procedure can be performed using this technology. Laparoscopy has been associated with a faster recovery time than conventional surgery.

GDV can be caused by an abdominal tumor that changes the position of the stomach. In some cases, it can also occur soon after a dog has heavy exercise after eating a large meal. To help prevent GDV, you should feed smaller, more frequent meals and restrict exercise for a period of time after eating.