

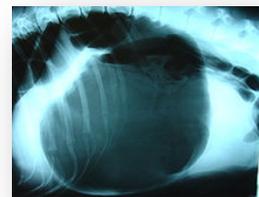
Health - Bloat or Gastric Torsion

This is the greatest killer of any of the large, deep chested breeds. It's the subject of much research. Despite this, it still manages to take away many dogs before their time and in a very horrible way. A cross-section through a Bracco would show how deep the body cavity is. There are muscles around the vertebrae that give strength to the back and allow it to be flexed and stretched when running. The stomach hangs like a handbag with both straps broken within this deep body cavity.

There are other ways in which the stomach is held in place. There's support provided by the junction with the esophagus or gullet, and support provided by the junction with the first part of the small intestine, the "broken straps of the handbag." The only other support is a thin layer of partially opaque internal skin called the peritoneum.

It is no wonder that the stomach can move around easily. Those breeds with the deepest chests are at the greatest risk of having their whole stomachs twist around - this is called gastric torsion! This cuts off the blood supply and prevents the stomach's contents from leaving, and increases the amount of gas in the stomach. Once these things have happened, surgery is vital. If the blood supply has been cut off too long and a bit of the stomach wall dies, death of the dog is almost inevitable.

The horrendous pain of this condition is due to the stomach walls being stretched by the gas caught in the stomach, as well as the stomach walls desperately needing the blood that cannot get to it. There is the pain of not being able to pass a much greater than normal amount of wind; added to this is pain equivalent to that of a heart attack, which is due to the heart's muscles being starved of blood.



What is Bloat?

Bloat occurs when something goes wrong during digestion of food. Something causes gases to build up in the stomach so fast that the stomach blows up like a balloon, stretching the organ so much that normal circulation of blood to and from the heart is cutoff. The stretching itself and the lack of blood to the stomach's cells can cause cell death, or necrosis. What makes it even worse and more immediately

serious is when the stomach actually “twists and turns” (known as volvulus) at the top near the esophagus and at the bottom of the stomach at the pyloric valve. Picture a tootsie roll candy that’s got a wrapper twisted at both ends keeping the candy lodged inside the paper. That is exactly what happens to the stomach during bloat with volvulus. Gas is trapped and can’t escape as a burp or the other end as “passing gas.” The gas builds and builds as it becomes trapped within the stomach. The stomach grows so large it cuts off circulation, as mentioned above, and irreversible damage is done to the cells. The dog goes into shock and then cardiac arrest. This can happen within several hours after the start of bloat. That is why if you suspect your dog is experiencing this problem, you must RUSH THE DOG IMMEDIATELY to the vet or animal hospital.

What Causes Bloat?

It is not really known what exactly triggers bloat to occur. Scientists can only make guesses due to the data taken from dogs that have experienced it. When they’ve tried to recreate the bloating conditions in a lab with test dogs, they were always unsuccessful at causing the bloat to occur intentionally.

A few examples of what scientists believe to be contributing factors to the causes of bloat are listed below:

1. Large meals eaten at one time. They recommend serving your dog two smaller meals a day, rather than just one big one.
2. Rigorous exercise done either right before a meal or right after one. You should wait one hour before feeding after exercise and one hour after eating before you let your dog run around.
3. Dry food given that is high in grain, which causes fermentation during digestion which causes gas. Dry food should have meat, meat meal and bone meal listed within the first few ingredients, not grain. In other words, dry food should have more meat than grain in its ingredients. [some texts claim this is not true, but most do agree with it.]
4. If only dry food is given, some people moisten it with water if it is a high-end dog food. However, with lesser quality foods, less meat-based dog food, the ones that are mostly grains, it is better to NOT wet the food, since water mixed with grain will start fermentation, a process that has by-products of gas. But if the food is mostly meat, it's OK, and can actually help with digestion. Mix dry food with canned food if possible.
5. Gulping large amounts of water at one time during meals. Keep water within the dog’s reach at all times, except during meals.
6. Be careful of snacks and biscuits that are high in carbohydrates. Grains are carbohydrates.
7. Avoid dog food high in citric acid used as a preservative and also food that is high in fat.

Other Factors which Increase Risk of Bloat

1. Dog's Breed—Large-breed dogs are most susceptible, although on occasion, small dogs may bloat too.
2. Dogs that are “deep-chested.” This means the length of the chest from backbone to sternum is long and the width of the chest is narrower.
3. Dogs that have ancestor-history of bloating. It's thought to be hereditary.
4. Underweight, or thin, dogs.
5. Anxious or fearful temperament. These dogs should always eat in an environment made as peaceful as possible for them.
6. Aggressive dogs. Numbers five and six indicate that “nerves” or emotions can play a role in triggering a bloat episode.
7. Male dogs get it more than females.
8. Dogs older than seven years of age are more at risk than those that are younger.

Signs and Symptoms

Know your dog. Most of the symptoms are behavioral, at least in the very beginning, so your dog will start to act differently. The abdomen is stretched to many times its normal size due to an increase in gas. It will blow up like a balloon and is one of the first most obvious signs. In some cases, this part of the bloat event can't be seen. But, usually you can see the distended abdomen which will also feel very hard to the touch, like a ball that has been pumped up with too much air.

This event causes SEVERE abdominal pain. So, you may see that your dog is acting uncomfortable, pacing the floor, not being about to find a comfortable position to lie down or may make sounds like he is in pain.

The biggest, most obvious symptom is that the dog appears to be nauseated. He will unsuccessfully attempt to vomit and will retch and gag, but nothing comes up, or very little, if any. He will also attempt to have a bowel movement, assume the position, but again, nothing comes out. Excessive drooling is also a common symptom.

IF ANY OF THESE THINGS HAPPEN, CALL YOUR VETERINARIAN OR RUSH YOUR DOG TO THE NEAREST ANIMAL HOSPITAL. It is better to be safe than sorry. As mentioned earlier, there are only a few hours available to handle this problem, so time is everything in a case of bloat. Your vet will put everything else aside to address your dog's condition.

How do They Treat Bloat

There are only two basic things that are done to the dog in the case of bloat. The first thing a vet may try

is to insert a tube down the throat making a passage for the gas to escape. But if the stomach has twisted volvulus, surgery is the only solution. The vet will have to make an incision into the stomach and relieve the gas that way. While in there, he may decide to perform what is called gastropexy. This is where the stomach is actually stapled into its normal position, or anchored into place, so that it cannot blow up should there be another episode of bloat.

Even if the dog has been relieved of the bloat with just a tube and not surgery, he should be surgically examined regardless, so that the vet may assess the damage done by the episode. Damaged parts of the stomach may need to be removed, or the patient's owner may decide to allow gastropexy since many dogs that experience bloat often go through it again at a later date. Sometimes only a day or two later, they may bloat again.

It is a good idea to have on hand at home an over the counter drug such as Phazyme, Mylanta Gas (not regular Mylanta) or Gas-X. They contain simethicone which helps reduce gas. This may buy you a little more time to get to a vet.