

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 bloated stomach, gas and/or food stretches the stomach to many times its normal size, causing tremendous abdominal pain. For reasons we do not fully understand, this grossly distended stomach tends to rotate, thus twisting off not only its own blood supply but also the only exit routes for the gas inside. The spleen, which normally nestles along the greater curvature of the stomach, can twist as well, cutting off its circulation. The distended stomach becomes so large that it compresses the large veins that run along the back, returning the body's blood to the heart and creating a circulatory shock. Not only is this collection of disasters 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.

Which 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 Great Danes have a 42% chance. The risk of developing the condition increases with age, but 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.

If a GDV is suspected, abdominal x-rays will be required to investigate. Once the condition is confirmed, there are several life staging 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. The cost of a keyhole gastropexy is £576 on its own or at the time of another non-laparoscopic procedure such as castration. The cost is reduced to £400 if performed at the time of a laparoscopic spay.