

# Gastric Dilatation Volvulus (Bloat)

## A Brief Introduction to Bloat

Bloat is a life-threatening condition requiring urgent veterinary attention. It mainly affects large, deep-chested breeds.

### What happens during bloat?

The stomach becomes dilated due to an abnormal accumulation of gas / air. The enlargement often results in the gut twisting. This twisting (volvulus) then sets up a series of reactions within the dog's body, resulting in a critical condition which is often fatal. The series of events can occur very quickly, sometimes within minutes. So recognizing the early signs of bloat is essential in giving your dog the best possible chance of recovery.

### When is bloat likely to occur?

Bloat usually occurs after the age of 12 months. Age is a predisposing factor. However, it can affect puppies, but this is very rare. Bloat often starts late in the evening. Sadly, many dogs appear to suffer subsequent episodes of bloat.

### What are the causes of bloat?

There are many and varied theories as to the causes of bloat, some are based on scientific evidence but many are based on anecdotal evidence. Some people believe there is a familiar tendency. The main predisposing factors, after conformation, can be divided into food related and physical or environmental issues:

<b>Food</b>	<b>Physical / environmental</b>
Eating too quickly and ingesting large amounts of air	Illness and age. Some dogs may be more susceptible simply because of their temperament
Too much food in one meal	Change in the dog's surroundings
Sudden changes in diet	Males living with bitches in season
Dry foods containing certain oils	Some dogs are stressed by showing
Delays in the passage of food through the gut	Fear of thunderstorms
Presence of certain bacteria in the stomach causing abnormal levels of fermentation	Death of owner or dog companion

### **What are the signs of bloat?**

- Restlessness / pacing
- Unproductive vomiting / retching – usually this is often accompanied by a frothy substance which resembles whisked egg white and / or bubbles.
- Abdominal swelling – this does not always occur
- Tightness over the abdomen – you can feel this yourself
- The dog adopts a characteristic stance – front legs apart and head down
- Later signs include difficulty in breathing, gums white or blue
- Very late phase, state of shock and collapse. People report seeing the phases of bloat unfold rapidly giving little time to engage veterinary assistance but equally the phases can occur over hours. Sometimes dogs unattended overnight will die before assistance can be sought.



- It is important to know your dog's normal behaviour so that you can more easily recognize abnormal or unusual behaviour
- Not all the classic signs of bloat may be present or obvious
- Even dogs who have bloated on more than one occasion, can display different signs

### ***As soon as you are suspicious your dog is in the early stages of bloat:***

Call your vet and be able to give the best possible history of events and what signs your dog is displaying.

### **What can you do?**

Talk to your veterinary surgeon on registering with the Practice and find out whether the Practice is equipped to deal with the surgical emergency of volvulus – i.e. does your vet have experience of the necessary surgical techniques and what facilities are available should your dog require 'out of hours' treatment? Find out what first aid your vet would recommend rather than go on the internet and try attempting elaborate techniques yourself.

If you live in a remote area, miles from your vet, you may need to attempt first aid yourself. Again discuss with your vet what actions you can safely take to relieve the dog's symptoms and obtain the necessary approved equipment and keep this clean and handy.

## **Prevention**

- Get to know your dog's normal behaviour so you can easily recognize when something is wrong
- Feed your dog twice a day (or more, if appropriate) to prevent overloading the stomach
- Avoid gulping of food
- Any changes to diet should be gradually – over a few days
- Avoid exercise for at least an hour before and after a meal
- Do not feed immediately before or after any situation which may cause your dog stress. If you withhold food on the day of a show, on returning home, do not feed a large meal to your dog.
- Avoid excessive drinking at one time
- Make sure your veterinary surgeon offers 24 hour surgical cover and discuss what would happen in the event of bloat, before it occurs. It is crucial that both parties be prepared and understand their individual roles, so that the best possible outcome is achieved, should an episode of bloat occur. Most vets are now aware of the importance of early diagnosis and intervention, but if you are not confident of this, speak to your vet about your concerns.

## **Treatment**

As per your veterinary surgery – discuss what the options are and what surgical techniques your vet is able to perform. Again, have this conversation before you need his / her services. The early hours of the morning when you are upset and your Dane is in danger, is not the time to be questioning your vet on his surgical abilities.

The common surgical treatment / procedure for Gastric Dilatation Volvulus is gastropexy. The procedure involves attaching (stapling) the stomach to the body wall in order to prevent the stomach twisting, volvulus. But stapling does not prevent the stomach filling up with gas in the future.

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