

# *BLOATING IN DOGS*

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The term bloat describes a condition in dogs where the stomach grossly distends with gas and food. When the stomach stretches to many times the normal size, it causes significant pain. While the stomach is distended, it rotates about 270 degrees. This rotation twists off the blood supply to the stomach while trapping food and gas inside the stomach.

A bloat is also known as a GDV – a gastric dilatation and volvulus. This is a life threatening condition and is seen with some regularity at veterinary hospitals. Patients die within a matter of hours unless emergency surgery is performed.

The symptoms of bloat include dry heaving or unsuccessful vomiting because the stomach is twisted closed. Dogs will often drool, pant, and pace. Some owners are able to see their dogs' stomach is distended and firm. Dogs in the later stage of bloat are in shock and are usually found laying on their side, panting, extremely weak and lethargic.

Any breed of dog can bloat, but most have a deep chest like a greyhound or Irish Setter has. The three breeds most susceptible to bloat are Great Danes, Saint Bernards, and Weimaraners. I have certainly seen many Rottweilers, Boxers, Labradors, German Shepherds, and Standard Poodles bloat (including my own Standard Poodle).

Bloat is more common in older dogs, but dogs that are only a few years old can bloat. Male dogs are at an increased risk. There is a genetic component, so it helps if you know your dog's family history.

Elevated food or water bowls have been shown to increase the risk of bloat. I recommend only using elevated food bowls if the dog has arthritis, which prevents it from easily bending its neck. Dogs fed only once a day had a greater chance of bloating. Moistening dry foods (as opposed to feeding a canned food) or restricting water before or after meals is a risk for bloating.

The presence of cereal ingredients; soy, wheat, or corn, in the first four ingredients of the ingredient list has not been shown to increase the risk of bloat.

Feeding canned food as part of the diet has been shown to decrease the risk of bloat. Feeding more than once a day can help prevent bloating, too.

Some owners with high-risk dogs elect to have preventative surgery. In this procedure, the stomach is surgically sutured to the opposite body wall to prevent the stomach from twisting.

To confirm a bloat, x-rays need to be taken. Emergency surgery is required to correct the bloat (by untwisting the stomach) and the dogs are usually hospitalized for several days.

Something to always remember: if your dog is dry heaving, or repeatedly trying to vomit, take him right away to the veterinarian. For reasons not clear, bloats often occur during the evening. Learn where your emergency veterinarian is located.