

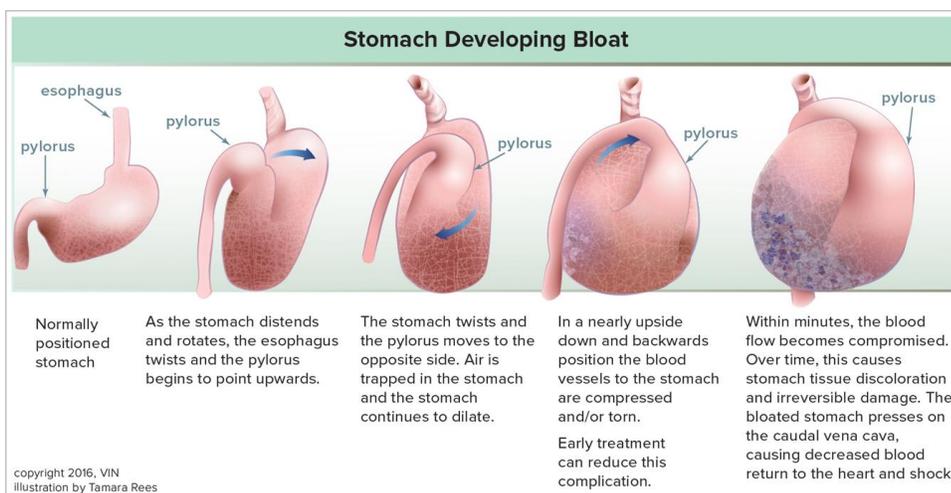
Bloat - The Mother of All Emergencies

From The Pet Health Care Library – veterinarypartner.com

There are many injuries and physical disorders that represent life-threatening emergencies. There is only one condition so drastic that it overshadows them all in terms of rapidity of consequences and effort in emergency treatment. This is the gastric dilatation and volvulus – the bloat.

What is it and Why is it so Serious?

The normal stomach sits high in the abdomen and contains a small amount of gas, some mucus, and any food being digested. It undergoes a normal rhythm of contraction, receiving food from the esophagus above, grinding the food, and meting the ground food out to the small intestine at its other end. Normally this proceeds uneventfully except for the occasional burp.



In the bloated stomach, gas and/or food stretches the stomach 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 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, creating circulatory shock. Not only is this collection of disasters extremely painful, it is also rapidly life-threatening. A dog with a bloated, twisted stomach (more scientifically called gastric dilatation and volvulus, will die in pain in a matter of hours unless drastic steps are taken.

What are the Risk Factors for Developing Bloat?

Classically, this condition affects dog breeds which are said to be deep chested, meaning the length of their chest from backbone to sternum is relatively long while the chest width from right to left is narrow. Examples of deep chested breeds would be the Great Dane, Greyhound, and the setter breeds. Still, any dog can bloat, even dachshunds and chihuahuas.

Dogs weighing more than 99 pounds have an approximate 20 percent risk of bloat.

The risk of bloating increases with age.

Classically, the bloated dog has recently eaten a large meal and exercised heavily shortly thereafter. Still, we usually do not know why a given dog bloats on an individual basis. No specific diet or dietary ingredient has been proven to be associated with bloat.

Factors Increasing the Risk of Bloating

- Feeding only one meal a day
- Having closely related family members with a history of bloat
- Eating rapidly
- Being thin or underweight
- Moistening dry foods (particularly if citric acid is listed as a preservative)
- Feeding from an elevated bowl
- Restricting water before and after meals
- Feeding a dry diet with animal fat listed in the first four ingredients
- Fearful or anxious temperament
- History of aggression towards people or other dogs
- Male dogs are more likely to bloat than females
- Older dogs (seven - 12 years) were the highest risk group

Factors Decreasing the Risk of Bloat

- Including canned dog food in the diet
- Including table scraps in the diet
- Happy or easy-going temperament
- Feeding a dry food containing a calcium-rich meat meal (such as meat/lamb meal, fish meal, chicken by-product meal, meat meal, or bone meal) listed in the first four ingredients of the ingredient list.
- Eating two or more meals per day

Contrary to popular belief, cereal ingredients such as soy, wheat, or corn in the first four ingredients of the ingredient list do not increase the risk of bloat.

How to tell if your Dog has Bloat

The hallmark presentation of bloat is a sudden onset of abdominal distention, distress, anxiety and pain (panting, guarding the belly, anguished facial expression), and multiple attempts at vomiting that are frequently unproductive. Not every dog will have a classic appearance and some dogs will not have obvious abdominal distention because of their body configuration. If you are not sure, it is best to err on the side of caution and rush your dog to the veterinarian **IMMEDIATELY**.

Prevention: Gastropexy Surgery

Preventive gastropexy is an elective surgery usually done at the time of spay or neuter in a breed considered at risk. The gastropexy, as mentioned, tacks the stomach to the body wall so that it cannot twist and cause a life-threatening bloat. The stomach may distend with gas in an attempt to bloat but since twisting is not possible, this becomes a painful and uncomfortable situation but nothing more serious than that. A study by Ward, Patonek, and Glickman reviewed the benefit of prophylactic surgery for bloat. The lifetime risk of death from bloat was calculated, along with estimated treatment for bloat, versus cost of prophylactic gastropexy. Prophylactic gastropexy was found to make sense for at-risk breeds, especially the Great Dane, which is at highest risk for bloat.