

Veterinary Fact Sheet

Frequently Asked Questions - Bloat (GDV)

Commonly known as “bloat”, Gastric Dilatation and Volvulus Syndrome (GDV) is a condition in dogs in which the stomach greatly enlarges and then twists on itself. This is a life-threatening emergency seen mostly in large, deep-chested dogs, such as greyhounds. If you suspect that your dog is suffering from bloat, immediate emergency veterinary treatment is essential.

TREATMENT OF THIS DISEASE IS AN EMERGENCY.

GDV is called bloat because gas and/or food and liquid stretches the stomach to many times its normal size. This causes the stomach to turn on itself, sealing off both the entry and exit from the stomach. The nearby spleen is also dragged out of position and swells placing pressure on the major vein bringing blood back to the heart from the lower body. The stomach lining begins to die and releases toxins into the blood stream. Among other damaging events, the heart begins to fail. Without immediate care the dog goes into shock and dies. This animated video shows GDV occurring: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JaAN-6FrPTM>

What are the signs of Bloat?

Greyhounds with bloat are in extreme pain. Greyhounds will show:

- Restlessness including pacing, panting or rapid breathing, and reluctance to settle.
- Retching, or attempting to vomit, without actually vomiting anything up, except for sometimes foam and saliva.
- Drooling or excessive salivation.
- A swollen stomach, which is hard to the touch, starting on the left hind side of the body.
- Over time, the dog becomes lethargic (sluggish and slow to respond) and their gums will be pale as shock sets in.
- If you notice your greyhound is restless and the left side of their abdomen is swollen or hardening, **seek veterinary treatment immediately.**

How is Bloat treated?

Bloat must be treated quickly by a veterinarian. The dog is first given intravenous fluids and other treatments to combat shock, pain and infection. Your vet will then X-ray your greyhound and if the opening to the stomach is not completely closed, they will try to pass a tube down their throat into the stomach to let the gas out and empty the stomach. If the stomach tube cannot be passed, your greyhound will require surgery.

During surgery, your vet will open the stomach to relieve the gas and remove the food and liquid inside. If not caught very early, parts of the stomach and spleen may have begun to die, and these will need to be removed. Then your vet will untwist the stomach and permanently stitch it into its correct anatomical position. Although this stitching procedure is not always successful, the procedure greatly reduces the likelihood of recurrence.

Where surgery is not required to relieve the bloat, your veterinarian may suggest surgery to prevent bloat occurring again once the dog has recovered. This surgery would be to stitch the stomach into its correct position. The recurrence rate of bloat and/or GDV is very high, but recurrence of volvulus is decreased with a gastropexy.

Bloat is expensive to treat due to the need for intensive care and surgery. If not caught early, surgery is very risky due to the effects that shock has on the body systems. In some cases, surgery cannot fix the damage, and the greyhound will die or be euthanased either during the surgery or during recovery, despite the best veterinary care. Identifying bloat early and seeking immediate veterinary attention is the key to preventing death from bloat.

What causes Bloat?

There are many theories about the cause of GDV. Factors may include:

- feeding large meals of food, particularly dry food
- abrupt changes in diet
- exercise either immediately before or after feeding
- drinking a large amount of water before or after eating
- greedy gulping of food
- feeding ad lib (leaving food out at all times)
- being closely related to a dog who has a history of GDV

Other causes such as grass eating and lack of bulk in the diet have been proposed, but nothing has been proven. The actual cause of gastric dilation and volvulus has yet to be fully determined.

How do I reduce the risk of Bloat?

Given the theory that large meals may cause bloat, it is recommended:

- to feed two or three smaller meals per day
- to **not** feed for two hours before or after vigorous exercise

A gastropexy (affixing the stomach in place surgically) is sometimes undertaken at the time of desexing to further reduce the risk of GDV.

Do not breed from dogs who have suffered and survived GDV.

It is important to note that if treated appropriately as an emergency, with stabilisation of the patient and prompt surgical correction of GDV, the survival rate is around 87%.¹ Conversely, if treatment is delayed and part of the stomach dies (gastric necrosis), there is a much lower survival rate, with an increase in euthanasia or death of cases.

Earlier veterinary intervention is also likely to result in lower veterinary treatment costs on average due to a shorter surgical procedure and reduced period or intensity of hospital stay.

¹ <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/avj.12942>