



Dogs and Bloat

A Dangerous Combination

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I don't remember the dog's name, but I will never forget the donuts.

It was nearly forty years ago when, as a new veterinary technician, I assisted for the first time in an emergency surgery; one with an extremely uncertain outcome – a delicate balance between life and death for a middle-aged Dalmatian. At his home, this counter-surfing dog had discovered waxed paper bags full of chocolate donuts. He gobbled an entire dozen before being caught – then hung his head and slinked out of the kitchen, crumbs dropping from his lips. Later that evening when the dog acted sick, it seemed he would simply vomit up the donuts with no further complications. Instead, he could not stop drooling, panting, and retching. His owners raced him to the hospital after noticing their dog's belly had ballooned to the size and hardness of a basketball. X-rays quickly confirmed the veterinarian's diagnosis of Gastric Dilatation-Volvulus (GDV).

What is Gastric Dilatation-Volvulus (GDV)?

GDV, also commonly known as “bloat,” is a serious, life-threatening condition requiring emergency veterinary intervention. Without immediate surgery, a dog with GDV symptoms can suffer a painful death in as little as an hour or two. It is important to note that in some cases, even with timely treatment and successful surgery, a multitude of post-operative complications can arise, decreasing the chances of survival.

GDV happens when a dog's stomach fills with air, food, water, or any combination thereof. The stomach then flips completely around, rotating on its axis, cutting off the blood supply throughout the body. As the stomach expands with trapped gases, it creates pressure on veins, arteries, and vital organs including the heart, liver, and spleen. This progression of events occurs without warning, rapidly leading to shock and death if left untreated.

A similar condition, referred to as Gastric Dilatation, presents with identical symptoms except that the stomach does not twist. In these instances, it is

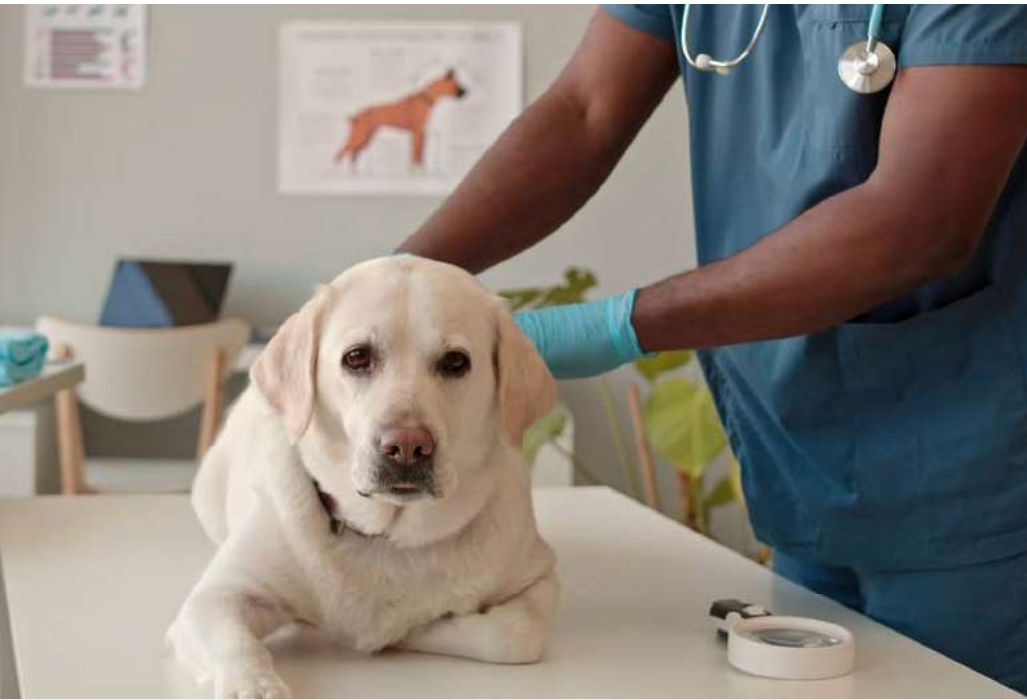
possible for dogs to be treated without the need for surgery, however, a trip to the emergency veterinary clinic is still warranted, as these so-called “simple bloat” cases can quickly lead to life-threatening GDV.

What Causes GDV?

GDV can occur in all dogs of any size, however it is most common in deep-chested, large and giant breeds such as Great Danes, Saint Bernards, Weimaraners, Setters, Dobermans, Bassett Hounds, Standard Poodles, and German Shorthaired Pointers, to name a few. The condition can develop in both mixed-breed and pure-bred dogs. Middle-aged dogs are affected more often but GDV can strike at any age – even in young and otherwise healthy pups. As dogs become older, the risk for developing this condition increases.

The exact cause of GDV is still not known. Certain dog behaviors may contribute to an increased chance of a GDV episode, such as eating or drinking too fast, consuming a large meal and/or a large amount of water quickly, and strenuous activity immediately after eating and drinking.





What is Gastropexy, and How Can it Help?

A surgical option exists for the prevention of GDV called gastropexy. Veterinarians often recommend this procedure for giant breeds and other at-risk dogs, and it can be performed at the time of spaying or neutering. Gastropexy entails permanently attaching a part of the stomach to the inside of the abdominal wall, using sutures. Tacking the stomach in this manner prevents it from twisting and flipping, which greatly reduces the severity should bloat ever occur. The procedure may be performed laparoscopically for dogs who are already spayed or neutered. Check with your pet insurance company, as some plans may cover the costs of preventive gastropexy.

The Donut-Eating Dalmatian

Several days after emergency treatment and surgery, the donut-eating Dalmatian was discharged from the hospital and doing well. Some dogs are not lucky enough to return home after such an experience. After all these years, with so many technological advances in veterinary medicine, GDV remains a condition that can kill. Being aware can help reduce high-risk situations. It also helps to have a plan in place with emergency veterinary hospital contact numbers at the ready, should your dog exhibit any signs that lead you to believe they might be in trouble. The faster the problem is addressed, the better the chances of successful and complete recovery.



Signs Your Dog is in Trouble

Recognizing the initial signs of GDV and seeking immediate care at the closest emergency veterinary hospital increases your dog's chances of survival. Please remember that your dog may need specialized emergency surgery; your regular veterinarian in general practice is most likely unable to provide this level of treatment. Call the closest emergency veterinary clinic if your dog experiences any of these signs typical of GDV:

- Retching (dog attempts to vomit but cannot)
- Excessive drooling
- Panting/rapid breathing
- Distended, painful abdomen
- Anxious pacing/restlessness
- Pale or white gum color
- Lethargy
- Collapsing/inability to move or stand



Preventing GDV

Consuming large quantities of food and water quickly causes excess air to be swallowed, setting dogs up for an increased risk of GDV. While there is no guaranteed method to prevent GDV, one of the most effective ways to lower the risk is to ensure your dog eats and drinks small amounts at a time – and slowly. Consider making these simple changes in their feeding routine:

- Feed several smaller meals instead of one or two big servings.
- Slow down speedy eaters with a “slow feeder” – a strangely-shaped bowl containing built-in spacers, projections, or maze-like configurations that prevent your dog from gulping their meals too quickly.
- Hand-feed or use a food puzzle.
- For multiple-dog households, separating dogs at mealtime helps reduce competitive, frantic eating behavior.
- Always offer water in small quantities. Never allow your dog to suck down a giant bowl of water all at once, especially after eating.
- Hold off on strenuous physical activity immediately following meals. Wait at least an hour or two after eating before engaging your dog in play and exercise.