

## Let's Talk About Bloat

Gastric dilatation-volvulus (GDV), commonly called “bloat” (also sometimes referred to as a gastric torsion), is a life-threatening emergency that commonly affects dogs. It occurs primarily in large, deep-chested breeds. GDV occurs without warning and is very difficult to treat.

### What is GDV?

Gastric dilatation-volvulus is an acute swelling of the stomach. The stomach fills rapidly with excessive gas, which distorts and enlarges it. The stomach is not able to rid itself of the excess gas and may twist on its axis, causing obstructions at each end of the stomach (“volvulus” refers to the twisting motion). Therefore both the esophagus and intestines may become twisted shut. A dog may appear uncomfortable, pace or salivate at this time. Some, however, show few signs; it depends upon the severity and rate at which the bloating occurs.

### Causes of GDV

Unfortunately, no one thing has been proven to cause bloat. It is normally seen in the large, deep-chested breeds (Great Danes, Collies, Dobermans, German Shepherds, or Boxers for example), but may also occur in smaller breeds, like Beagles and Bichons. It appears to run in hereditary lines of certain breeds. Eating or drinking too much or too fast has been thought to be a contributing factor, along with excessive exercising before a meal can be digested. A study published by the Purdue University School of Veterinary Medicine indicates that raising food bowls off the floor actually doubles the risk of bloat, rather than lowering the incidence at which it occurs. It does not seem to affect one sex more than the other, but is more likely to occur as a dog ages. Bloat commonly occurs in dogs between the ages of 7 and 12 years.

### Signs and symptoms

Vomiting, dry heaves, salivation and restlessness may all be signs of bloating. They may also just be signs of a stomachache. The most obvious sign is distention and swelling of the abdominal cavity as the stomach expands. Dogs will often assume an unnatural body posture, standing with head and neck extended. A veterinary hospital will confirm the diagnosis with an abdominal x-ray. GDV causes a total collapse. The dog goes into shock, and ultimately can die from cardiac irregularities.

### Treatment

A GDV case must be attended to rapidly if the pet is to be saved. Unfortunately, according to statistics, over 50% of GVD cases will die even with veterinary attention. Treatment for shock should be started in early phases, and the stomach decompressed. This may be accomplished by passing a stomach tube, but sometimes surgery will be the only option to try to save the pet. Surgery does not guarantee a happy outcome, unfortunately, and some pets will not recover even with it. After surgery, several days of hospitalized care will be necessary. If your dog is boarding while you travel and requires surgery and depending upon the length of your travel, your dog may still be hospitalized when you return home. A pet that lives through a bloating episode, but does not have corrective surgery, will be at a high risk for another attack. Without “tacking” the stomach in place, a dog will most likely bloat again.

### Does bloating occur only at pet care facilities?

No. Since all the factors that contribute to GDV are not clear, there is no way of predicting when a bloating episode may occur. It can happen in a grooming shop, a veterinary office, a boarding kennel, a dog daycare, or at home. Sometimes owners will notice the signs, but not attribute them to a real problem until the pet collapses. Your PCSA pet care facility manager and staff are acutely

aware of the dangers of a gastric torsion, and constantly monitor dogs in their care.

### **Can the pet care facility prevent my dog from bloating?**

Most pet care facilities take precautions to not overfeed or let pets drink excessive amounts of water. If aware of a hereditary problem, special observation notes may be made. Dogs are exercised well before or after meals. Even with careful precautions and diligent observation, GDV may occur. In a boarding environment, bloating seems to occur with a higher frequency at night or in the early morning hours. Even facilities with live-in staff will have dogs suffer from a bloating incidence. You have a right for your pet care facility to provide the best possible care, just as the pet care facility has a right to expect you to accept financial responsibility for such care. GDV can be an expensive medical condition, so discuss guidelines for financial responsibility with your pet care facility manager and be sure to leave an emergency number where you can be reached.