

## Gastric Dilatation and Volvulus (GDV) – Essential Knowledge for Dog Owners

Gastric dilatation and volvulus (GDV), colloquially referred to as 'bloat', is an acute life-threatening condition characterised by distension and rotation of the stomach. GDV is a rapidly and progressive condition and suspected cases should be treated as an emergency and seen as soon as possible.

### Early Warning Signs of GDV

In the early stages of GDV, dogs will display signs of abdominal discomfort. These may include restlessness, drooling, stretching out into the 'praying' position, bloating and unproductive retching. As the condition progresses your dog will become increasingly unwilling to stand and may display difficulty in breathing. If you notice any of these signs, contact us immediately for advice.



### What is GDV and Why Does it Happen?

Dilatation occurs due to the accumulation of food and gas in the stomach.

Dogs with GDV are unable to empty their stomach contents and begins to dilate and expand. The increase in pressure and size of the stomach can have several severe life threatening consequences including:

- Breathing difficulties
- Prevention of blood flow from the abdomen back to the heart
- Potential rupture of the stomach wall

### Treatment of GDV

When dogs arrive at the hospital, they are usually in a state of shock and stabilisation of the patient will be initiated immediately upon arrival. Initially this may include blood tests, intravenous fluid therapy, pain relief relief, oxygen therapy, antibiotics and x-rays. As soon as the patient is stabilised, the stomach must then be decompressed. This can be achieved either by passing a stomach tube down the oesophagus or by inserting a wide gauge needle through the skin directly into the stomach. This provides a vital escape route for the trapped gas inside. This is usually followed by emergency surgery (once the patient is sufficiently stable) to de-rotate the stomach and fix it back in its normal position permanently (gastropexy). Other abdominal organs, such as the spleen and small intestine, will also need to be evaluated for damage and treated appropriately.

## Dogs at Risk of GDV

The exact cause of GDV is not fully understood, however several risk factors have been identified:

- Large or giant breed dogs, in particular the Great Dane, German Shepherd Dog, Doberman Pinscher, Saint Bernard, Standard Poodle, Weimeraner, Irish & Gordon Setter
- Deep or narrow chested dogs
- Age, most commonly affected dogs aged 7-10 years old
- Vigorous exercise undertaken after a large meal • Ingestion of a large volume of food or water within a short space of time, especially dry food of small particle size
- Feeding from an elevated bowl
- First degree relative with history of GDV

Some of these risk factors are unavoidable, however, there are some changes that you can make to your dog's daily regime in order to minimise some of the risk factors such as those associated with diet and exercise:

- Do not walk your dog within 2 hours of eating
- Consider feeding 2 small meals morning and evening rather than 1 large meal
- Feed a wet diet or soak biscuits before feeding
- Choose a diet of large kibble size
- Feed from a bowl on the floor

## Curly's GDV Emergency



Curly was recently rushed to our Edison Park Hospital and treated as GDV emergency by vet Alice. Her owner Jemima said:

*"The initial signs were very subtle. She just wasn't quite "herself". I didn't realise what it was until she ran out into the garden in the pitch black and started to dry-heave with a horrendous-sounding bellow, trying to expel the gas from her stomach. I got her to Eastcott within 20 minutes of that (15 miles) and we still nearly lost her. One of our retrievers bloated about 4 years ago. With him he was just a bit whingey, and it was only when I put my ear to his tummy that I realised it was distended. Another clue was that there were no digestive noises coming from his belly. The signs are clearly very variable. Bottom line: if you are remotely worried, please take to a vet whatever the time of day and night. It is always better to be safe than sorry. Bloat kills - and frighteningly quickly."*

Curly is pictured with Vet Alice who performed her life saving surgery

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