



Preventative Gastropexy (stomach tacking)

There are many injuries and physical disorders that represent life-threatening emergencies. Gastric dilatation and volvulus bears some of the highest consequences and effort in emergency treatment.

What is it and Why is it so Serious?

In the bloated stomach, gas and/or food stretches the stomach many times its normal size, causing tremendous abdominal pain. This distended stomach tends to rotate, twisting off not only its own blood supply but the only exit routes for the gas inside. The spleen can twist as well, cutting off its circulation. The distended stomach becomes so large that it compresses the large veins, creating circulatory shock. It is rapidly life-threatening. A dog with a bloated, twisted stomach (aka 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?

Dogs weighing more than 99 pounds have an approximate 20 percent risk of bloat. The risk of bloating increases with age and some breeds. Deep chested breeds are at the greatest risk: Great Dane (up to 40% risk reported), Greyhound, St Bernard, German shepherd dogs, boxers, standard poodles, and the setter breeds. However, any dog can bloat, even dachshunds and chihuahuas.

Summary of Factors Increasing the Risk of Bloat

- Large, deep chested breed
- Increasing age
- Having closely related family members with a history of bloat
- Eating rapidly
- Exercising immediately after eating
- Feeding from an elevated bowl
- Feeding a dry food with fat or oil listed in the first four ingredients.

Factors Decreasing the Risk of Bloat

- **Prophylactic gastropexy**
- 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

How to Tell if your Dog Has Bloat

Classically, the dog is distressed, makes multiple attempts to vomit, and the upper abdomen is hard and distended from the gas within, though in a well-muscled or overweight dog, the distention may not be obvious. 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**.

What Has to be Done

With emergency surgery, mortality is reduced from 100% to 30%.. At the time of surgery, gastropexy should be performed. Recurrence is 76% without gastropexy and drops to 6% with surgery. Surgery will prevent the stomach from twisting in the future but the stomach is still able to periodically distend with gas. This is uncomfortable but not life-threatening.

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 tacks the stomach to the body wall, which drastically reduces the stomach's ability to twist. 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. That said, gastropexy is not an absolute guarantee against twisting but the risk becomes minimal. A study 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 all at-risk breeds, especially the Great Dane, which is at highest risk for bloat.

What to expect after preventative gastropexy surgery

Preventative gastropexy generally requires a long incision along the abdomen. The outer layer of the stomach is incised and the inner layer of the body wall is incised. These layers are then sutured together. Once the sutures dissolve, scar tissue will hold the stomach in place against the body wall, preventing torsion in all but rare cases.

Leash walking only and smaller more frequent meals are given for 2 weeks in order to allow the incisions to heal. After that, your pet may resume a normal lifestyle, without the worry of GDV.