

PREVENTING GDV



Gastric dilatation-volvulus (GDV or “bloat”) is one of the most serious and deadly of diseases. It occurs when the stomach fills up with gas and then flips over, twisting on itself. Once flipped, the esophagus, intestines and blood supply are all twisted shut. Gas and fluid can’t escape out of the stomach so it becomes larger and larger, while the tissue is also dying from lack of blood and oxygen. GDV kills dogs very quickly and requires emergency surgery to prevent death.



The stomach flips, twists and then fills up with gas.
The gas-filled stomach fills most of the x-ray at right.

The risk of developing GDV over the lifetime of a dog is 21% for large breeds and 24% for giant breeds. The risk is worse for particular breeds, especially Great Danes, bloodhounds and Irish setters, and it slowly increases with age. Although it’s not possible to eliminate the risk there are things you can do to reduce the threat.

- 1) The most sure way to prevent GDV is to have your dog’s stomach “tacked,” which means we suture the stomach to the side of the body so that it can never twist on itself. This can be done through an abdominal incision, which we can do here, or via laparoscopy by a specialist.
- 2) There is no difference in GDV risk if you feed your pet either canned or dry dog food alone. However, you can reduce the risk by feeding some canned food or table food **along with** dry dog food. This simple thing reduces GDV risk 59% in large breed dogs and 28% on giant breeds.
- 3) Do not moisten dry food – this increases risk.
- 4) Feed several smaller meals a day. GDV risk is higher if a dog is fed one large meal per day. You also should prevent your dog from gulping down his food too fast. You can do this by spreading the food on a cookie sheet, adding rocks or log chain to the food bowl that he’ll have to work around, or using a special bowl with lumps in it that does the same thing. Dogs often eat faster when they are competing with each other, so separate your dogs at meal times if this is a problem for you.
- 5) Larger kibble size reduces GDV risk. Don’t feed a small food nugget made for small dogs to a large one.

6) Risk of GDV increases with the speed of eating. Using a bowl designed to slow eating, or adding log chain or rocks to your dog's bowl that he has to eat around, reduces risk considerably.

7) Do not withhold water before or after feeding. Restricting water increases risk. Giving your dog Ice water does NOT increase risk, despite an internet hoax that regularly shows up online.

8) Foods listing a fat source among the main four ingredients – the first four listed on the label – are associated with higher risk.

9) Don't feed your dog from elevated food bowls unless necessary for other health problems (neck pain, megaesophagus, etc.) Feeding from an elevated bowl increases GDV risk 51.9%.

10) It was once thought that restricting exercise after meals was helpful. It's not harmful but it's not been shown in studies to reduce risk either.

11) Thin pets are more prone. You don't want to have an overweight or obese pet, there are many health risks associated with that. However, a pet that is too thin has more GDV risk than a normal or overweight pet.

12) Dogs with other gastrointestinal diseases, such as IBD, are more at risk. In one study 86% of dogs that had surgery for GDV had a history of digestive problems and 61% of them had inflammatory changes in their intestines when biopsied at the time of GDV surgery. Gastrointestinal disorders should be treated quickly when they occur.

13) Don't purchase a puppy from a bloodline that includes a history of GDV. A dog with a sibling, parent or offspring that has had GDV is at much greater risk.

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2082 Cheyenne Court, Grafton, WI 53024 • phone: 262-375-0130 • fax: 262-375-4196 • www.bestfriendsvet.com

