

# Gastric Dilatation / Torsion (Bloat)

By Rodger Barr, DVM

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Gastric dilatation/torsion is a threat to all dogs, regardless of the breed. Veterinarians more commonly refer to this condition as gastric dilatation volvulus (GDV). I have seen it in dachshunds, Great Danes, German shepherds, borzois, Irish wolfhounds, Irish setters, malamutes, and, yes, also greyhounds. Are greyhounds predisposed to bloat? The incidence doesn't seem to be greater than that of any other large, deep-chested breed and, if the truth be known, is much less than they are given credit for. I have cared for many greyhounds over the past 40 years, and, to date, have personally treated less than a dozen cases of bloat. Two have been my own dogs. The first had cancer surgery at the University of Minnesota with radiation therapy to follow and she proceeded to bloat in the ICU; post-surgical bloat is not rare. My second was a kennel dog who bloated unexpectedly with no other extenuating circumstances.

The condition appears to be more prevalent in AKC greyhounds, possibly due to their extremely deep chests. I have received one call over the last five years from an owner who adopted a dog from NLGA whose greyhound had bloated. I personally know of two very famous stud dogs who experienced the condition—this is two out of thousands over the years. The bottom line is that the problem does occur, but I don't believe the frequency to be excessively high in greyhounds.

*Bloat* is not an accurate term for this condition; it suggests that the problem is just an accumulation of air, fluid, or food in the stomach. Actually it is a filling and a twisting of the stomach and adjacent structures, thus the more accurate term *torsion* should be added to the phrase. Frequently surgical intervention is required, but not always. If an exploratory procedure is initiated to resolve the condition, the surgeon is able to perform a permanent procedure called a gastropexy to prevent subsequent GDV episodes.

As knowledge is power, I will briefly touch upon the symptoms of a dog experiencing the early stages of bloat. The most frequent symptom is the development of dry heaves, attempts at vomiting that are, for the most part, unproductive. The second most frequently seen symptom is an enlarged abdomen. We, as owners of short-coated dogs, are able to recognize this sooner than the owners of long-haired breeds. Once symptoms are suspected, it is critical to seek professional help immediately. The more quickly the situation can be diagnosed and rectified, the fewer the complications from restricted blood supply within the abdominal cavity, etc.

Several precautionary practices should be adhered to. Avoiding exercise before feeding is of limited value, except that an exhausted dog should not be fed and should be given water at a reasonably slow rate. It helps immensely to feed at least two meals a day, which means all meals will be smaller in size. It used to be thought that avoiding exercise for at least two hours following a meal was an important part of prevention, but that theory has not been supported by research. That being said, common sense does support relaxation for a time after eating, for improved digestion as well as the avoidance of exercise-induced nausea.

Recent research suggests that raised feeders DO contribute to bloat. Greyhounds who have bad necks should be fed from a raised feeder, as it is more comfortable for them, but once their neck issues are resolved, ground-level feeding should be resumed. There is no other reason that one should feed any dog from a raised feeder. Apparently the raised feeders cause the swallowing of excessive air, which contributes to additional gastric inflation, a critical aspect of bloat. A second confirmed cause of bloat is the speed of food consumption. The faster a dog eats, the more prone it is to developing bloat. Several steps can be taken to reduce the speed of food consumption. Pet stores sell food dishes with columns in the bowl. The dog is forced to eat around the columns and not just plow through the entire dish with no hesitation. Dogs can also be fed from cookie sheets to slow down the speed of consumption. Post-surgical bloat is a definite risk, and the type of surgery doesn't seem to matter.

No one knows all the reasons that dogs bloat. Often the type of food is blamed. I believe some foods may be more responsible than others, but I'll leave that controversy for another time. My suggestions for all of you who share your lives with these wonderful animals is to enjoy them, relax, and don't live your lives in fear of bloat. Appreciate every day you live with good health, expect the best, and think positively. Consider the preventative suggestions presented in this paper, but don't lose sleep over this condition. As long as you are aware of what

to look for and what to do about symptoms that may develop, then you are armed with the knowledge that will help you whatever may occur.