

**Morris Hospital for Veterinary Services**  
26684 Grand River Ave, Redford, MI 48240  
(313) 537-6100 [www.morrisvet.com](http://www.morrisvet.com)

## **GASTRIC TORSION OR BLOAT**

One of the most feared syndromes encountered by veterinarians is the Gastric Dilatation/Volvulus Syndrome (also called GDV). GDV occurs when gas fills the stomach, and cannot escape either through the esophagus and mouth, or through the intestines. Gas (from fermentation of food, or swallowed air) fills the stomach like a balloon, eventually causing enough pressure on the abdominal organs and blood vessels, and on the chest, to cause shock and ultimately, death. A twisting of the stomach can also occur, kinking both the upper and lower stomach openings, resulting in the same shock and death.

GDV is particularly common in large or giant breed dogs, but any deep-chested dog (such as daschunds) can develop the syndrome. The causes of GDV are not completely understood, but veterinarians feel that large meals, or large amount of fluid intake, may contribute to the syndrome. It is suggested to feed dogs 2 smaller meals per day, versus one large meal. Additionally, exercise after eating or drinking may also contribute to the disease. Symptoms of GDV usually begin with retching or attempts at vomiting, sometimes food, sometimes water, or even just large amounts of foam. The dog may appear to be very restless, pacing, and being reluctant to lay down. Many times the dog owner notices that the abdominal area is enlarging; this suggests that the stomach is becoming increasingly more distended within the abdomen. **T H I S I S A N E M E R G E N C Y !** It is not unusual for this syndrome to develop very quickly. Many owners are shocked to come home after a few hour absence to find that there Shepherd, Great Dane, Bassett Hound, Pit Bull etc. is dead. Death can occur very rapidly and is VERY painful!

However, GDV can be difficult to diagnose if the stomach is only partially twisted; and it can be intermittent, meaning that the twisting, or overfilling with gas does not occur all of the time. Diagnosis is based upon the history, physical examination, and X-rays. Dogs who have intermittent gas-filling of the stomach can often go into full-blown GDV, where the stomach continues to fill with air/gas, and the dog will die. In the most severe cases, the stomach is very full of gas and X-rays can reveal that fact very easily.

Treatment in the acute state, where the stomach is over-distended and cannot empty, must begin immediately. The owner must make the decision quickly as to whether they want their pet treated or not. In the acute phase there are only 2 choices: either treat or euthanize (humanely end the pet's life). Treatment consists of both medical and surgical management. These patients are usually in, or close to going into, shock. Intravenous fluids and drugs are given to stabilize the dog as well as possible. The dog may be sedated or anesthetized to aid in the attempt to pass a rubber tube through the mouth and into the stomach. If the tube can be passed into the stomach, the pressure can be released; however, passing the tube does not CURE the syndrome, but temporarily relieves the bloating. The stomach may still be twisted, or may refill with air/gas. Therefore, surgery is necessary to untwist the stomach and "tack" it to the inside wall of the abdomen, to prevent twisting in the future.

The prognosis depends on how healthy the pet is before "bloating," how quickly the diagnosis is made and treatment initiated, and, how much damage has already been done to the stomach, internal organs and heart, before the surgery is performed. After the stomach is surgically untwisted, it usually takes 48-96 hours before we know if the pet is "out of the woods." Toxins from the damaged abdominal organs can be very poisonous to the heart. The dog may survive the surgery, only to succumb to heart arrhythmias or failure, several days after the operation.