Gastric Dilatation Volvulus (GDV) in Dogs

What is GDV?

Gastric Dilatation Volvulus, commonly known as "bloat," is a serious condition where a dog's stomach fills with gas and twists on itself (often in an anticlockwise direction). The twisting cuts off the blood supply to vital organs, and trapped gas in the stomach leads to further swelling. If untreated, GDV can lead to shock, organ damage, and can be life-threatening.

What Causes GDV?

The exact cause of GDV isn't fully understood, but it most commonly occurs in large, deep-chested dogs. Risk factors include:

- Large or giant breeds like Great Danes, Weimaraners, and Saint Bernards.
- Family history of GDV.
- Eating large meals quickly.
- Exercising or being stressed right after eating.

What are the Signs of GDV?

Dogs with GDV may show these symptoms:

- Unproductive retching: trying to vomit but nothing comes up.
- Restlessness and hypersalivation.
- Swollen abdomen.
- Signs of shock: weak pulse, pale gums, fast heartbeat.
- Severe cases: collapse, cold extremities, and lethargy.

What to Expect After Surgery

Post-operative care is crucial for recovery:

- Rest and monitoring: Your dog will need a calm environment and restricted activity for a few weeks to allow proper healing.
- Follow-up visits: Your vet will schedule check-ups to monitor healing and ensure there are no complications like infection or recurrence.
- Dietary changes: Your vet may recommend feeding smaller, more frequent meals to reduce the risk of bloat in the future.

Diagnosis

- Radiographs (X-rays): Your vet will take a right lateral X-ray of the abdomen. Radiographs of dogs with GDV are very characteristic and a diagnosis is typically achieved with just radiographs.
- Blood tests: GDV can cause kidney issues (due to poor blood flow), increased liver enzymes, and low platelet counts.

Treatment

Immediate veterinary care is crucial. Treatment includes:

- Stabilization: Before surgery, your vet will stabilize your dog with fluids, pain relief, oxygen, and decompressing of the stomach with a tube or a needle.
- Surgery: The goal of surgery is to untwist the stomach, assess the health of the stomach tissue, and secure the stomach to the abdominal wall (gastropexy) to prevent future twisting.
  - -Partial Gastrectomy: If part of the stomach has died due to lack of blood flow, the vet may need to remove the damaged tissue.
  - -Gastropexy: This is a procedure to secure the stomach to the body wall to prevent it from twisting again.

Prognosis

With surgery, about three quarter of dogs survive to discharge, but the outcome depends on factors such as:

- The dog's condition at the time of surgery (e.g., signs of shock, how long the GDV has been present).
- Whether any organs were damaged or needed removal (e.g., part of the stomach or spleen).
- The presence of post-operative complications like heart arrhythmias.

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How Can GDV Be Prevented?

Although GDV can't always be entirely prevented, there are steps you can take to reduce the risk, especially if your dog is a large, deep-chested breed (like Great Danes, Weimaraners, Saint Bernards, or Setters) or has a family history of GDV.

Key Preventive Steps

1.Feed Several Small Meals a Day: Instead of one or two large meals, split your dog's daily food into several smaller portions throughout the day. This reduces the amount of food and air going into the stomach at once, which can help prevent excessive stomach distension.

2.Avoid Vigorous Exercise Around Mealtime: Exercise or excitement immediately before or after meals can increase the risk of GDV. Try to keep your dog calm for at least 1 hour before and 1-2 hours after eating to allow proper digestion and reduce stress on the stomach.

3.Use a Slow Feeder or Puzzle Feeder: If your dog tends to eat too quickly, consider using a slow feeder bowl or puzzle toy to make meals last longer. This prevents gulping down large amounts of air, which can contribute to bloating.

4.Monitor Water Intake Around Meals: Encourage your dog to drink water regularly but avoid letting them drink large amounts immediately after a meal, which could contribute to stomach distension.

5.Choose Appropriate Feeding Habits and Diet:

- -Feed a diet with large kibble pieces to encourage chewing and slow down eating.
- -Avoid feeding your dog from an elevated bowl unless your vet recommends it for another health reason. Contrary to previous beliefs, using elevated bowls may increase the risk of GDV.
- -Avoid giving your dog foods that produce excessive gas, such as beans or highly fermentable foods.

6.Consider Prophylactic (Preventive) Gastropexy: For dogs at high risk of GDV (e.g., large, deep-chested breeds or those with a family history of bloat), prophylactic gastropexy is a surgical option to prevent the stomach from twisting. It is often performed when your dog is spayed or neutered, but it can also be done as a standalone procedure.

- -What is Gastropexy? This surgery attaches the stomach to the abdominal wall, preventing it from twisting. While it doesn't prevent the stomach from filling with gas (bloating), it significantly reduces the risk of the life-threatening torsion that comes with GDV.
- -Minimally Invasive Options: Gastropexy can be done laparoscopically (keyhole surgery), which is less invasive, has a quicker recovery, and is highly effective.

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