

# Heathcote Veterinary Clinic

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Hospital Hours  
Monday to Friday 9.00am – 7.00pm  
Saturday from 9.00am  
Sunday 9.00am – 12.00pm

## Bloat

Bloat is a **life-threatening** condition that pet owners should be trained to recognize so that they can seek immediate medical attention. There are also steps that can help minimize the risk of bloat, especially for breeds that are prone to this type of problem. Without emergency treatment, dogs with bloat will die. Sadly sometimes even with Emergency Surgery, dogs will still not survive so IMMEDIATE action by a vet is imperative!

### *What is bloat?*

Bloat occurs when the stomach becomes severely expanded due to the accumulation of fluids, food, and air in the digestive tract. This often causes the stomach to twist over on itself, effectively shutting down the entrance to and exit from the stomach cavity. This can result in the buildup of toxins in the stomach which can cause stomach rupture and an infection of the stomach cavity. In addition, the twisting of the stomach compresses a major artery and decreases blood flow, causing an irregular heartbeat in many cases. Other internal organs may also be affected as a result of the decreased blood flow. Because these changes can happen so quickly, a case of bloat can result in death in just a few hours.

### *What causes bloat?*

It is thought that the following factors may contribute to bloat:

- Eating Habits
- Exercise
- Stress
- Disposition

Some breeds are more predisposed - Although any dog can be affected by bloat, it most often occurs in deep-chested, large and giant breeds between the ages of 4 and 10 years old. Most commonly: Boxers, German Shepards, Laboradors, Great Dane, Golden Retrievers to name a few.

### *How can you recognize that bloat is occurring?*

**If you suspect bloat, take your dog to a veterinarian immediately.** The following can be signs of bloat, but don't waste too much time doing a self-diagnosis. It is much better to be safe than sorry.

- **Distended, gas-filled stomach**
- **Attempts to vomit without success**
- Whining
- Salivation
- Difficult breathing
- Rapid heartbeat
- Signs of shock
- Pale gums
- Shallow rapid breathing
- Cold skin
- Weakness
- Fast pulse
- Loss of consciousness

### ***What is the treatment for bloat?***

An x-ray is taken to determine if twisting of the stomach has in fact occurred. Attempts are made to decompress the stomach before surgery either via a trochar or passing of a stomach tube. The patient is then taken to surgery and the stomach is untwisted. The stomach is tacked to the right side of the body wall to prevent the stomach from twisting again. Sometimes a portion of the stomach has died and needs to be removed. If too much of the stomach is dead, euthanasia may be recommended. If the spleen has developed blood clots, it is removed. After surgery the patient is carefully monitored. Intravenous fluid therapy is continued after surgery. In some cases, artificial plasma (Hetastarch), plasma and blood transfusions may be needed.

### ***How can you help minimize the risk of bloat?***

The following measure can at least help minimize the risk of bloat, although they will not remove the risk entirely, since some of the factors are genetic/hereditary.

1. **Gastropexy** (surgical attachment of stomach to the body wall) is the most effective means of prevention. This does not prevent dilatation (bloat) but does prevent twisting (volvulus) in the majority of cases. A gastropexy can be done at the time of desexing for an additional \$100. In females, it will require a longer surgical incision. In males, it will mean 2 incision sites. Without gastropexy, the recurrence rate of bloat has been reported to be as high as 75%!
  
2. Careful attention to diet, feeding and exercise regimens may help to prevent gastric dilatation.
  - Feed your dog several small meals a day rather than one or two large meals. Mix your dog's dry food with water so that the expansion occurs prior to eating.
  - Teach your dog to eat slowly. Specialized bowls can be purchased at pet stores for this. For families with multiple dogs, feed them in separate rooms so that they don't feel the need to eat quickly.
  - Keep your dog from vigorous exercise one hour before and two hours after eating.
  - Don't allow your dog to drink large amounts of water before and after eating.
  - Avoid feeding "people food" or table scraps that may upset your dog's digestive system.
  - Know your dog's normal behavior, so that you can quickly recognize if there is a problem
  - Keep the location, hours, and phone numbers of veterinary clinic handy in case of an emergency.