GASTRIC DILATION AND VOLVULUS

What is GDV?

Large dog breeds with deep, narrow chests like Greyhounds are more likely than other breeds to develop a condition called Gastric Dilation and Volvulus, or GDV.

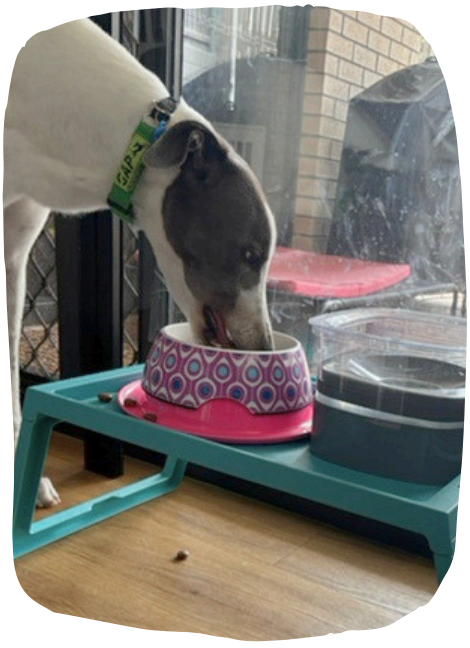
This condition is often called 'bloat' or 'twisted stomach' and refers to stomach distension and twisting. It occurs when the stomach fills with gas, fluid, food, foam, or any combination of these, causing it to swell (dilation). It then does a 180-to-360-degree twist on itself (volvulus). The twisting causes the distended stomach to press onto large blood vessels, disrupting the blood flow to internal organs, including stopping the blood flow to the stomach and spleen and putting pressure on essential blood supply to other parts of the body.

Dogs who experience GDV go into shock quickly and without treatment the condition can be fatal quickly. It can also affect breathing since the swelling limits chest movement.

What causes twisted stomach in dogs?

The exact reason why GDV occurs is still unknown. However, there are a number of factors that increase a dog's risk. These include:

- ingesting bones which can block the outflow of food, fluid and gas from the stomach
- foreign body obstruction (ingesting toys, corn cobs, for example)
- deep chested dogs such as greyhounds
- exercise immediately before or after eating
- ingestion of rapidly digested or highly processed dry food (gas formation)
- sudden change in diet
- lower body weight
- hereditary/ genetic predisposition
- kennelled dogs.



Are there dogs predisposed to GDV?

Any dog can develop GDV, but it is more common in some breeds than others. Large dog breeds with deep, narrow chests, like greyhounds, great danes, shepards, weimeraners and dobermans, are more likely to develop GDV. The problem can occur in small dogs, but only rarely.

Interestingly, male dogs are twice as likely to develop gastric dilatation and volvulus as females. Dogs over seven years of age are more than twice as likely to develop GDV than those who are two to four years of age.

What are the signs and symptoms of twisted stomach?

There are a number of signs and symptoms of GDV, some are obvious while others aren't. The more obvious signs include:

- abdominal distention (not always visible)
- when tapped the stomach makes a tympanic or 'ping' sound
- non-productive vomiting (appears to be vomiting, but nothing comes up or only produces white froth)
- retching or gagging unproductively
- lethargy/depression/change in behaviour
- increased water intake.

Other signs include:

- agitation
- discomfort
- abdominal pain ("tucked up" or "hunched" appearance)
- straining to defaecate
- difficulty breathing
- excessive salivation
- weak pulse
- rapid heart rate
- dark gums initially then progressing to pale/white gums
- shock
- collapse.

Bloat is a serious condition and needs immediate treatment. Without treatment, the condition can rapidly prove fatal. With early treatment, more than eighty per cent of dogs will survive.

GDV is a veterinary EMERGENCY - do not delay a veterinary visit.

What is the treatment for GDV?

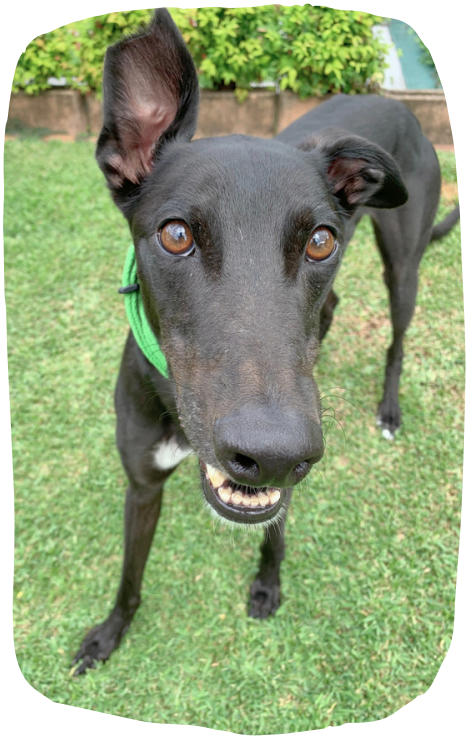
If you suspect your dog has GDV, do not delay treatment or wait for further signs to develop. The more delayed treatment is, the higher the risk and the poorer the outcome. Contact your veterinarian or local emergency centre immediately to advise you are attending so they can be prepared for your arrival.

Can you prevent GDV in dogs?

While your greyhound might be predisposed to developing GDV, there are ways in which you can prevent the risk of the condition occurring, such as:

- feed smaller meals more frequently rather than one large meal
- sccess to fresh water but limit the amount of water after a large meal or exercise to prevent a significant expansion of the stomach
- avoid vigorous exercise, excitement, and stress directly before and after meals
- increase feed consumption time by use of feeding bowls/slow feeders designed to slow down eating
- diet changes should be made gradually over a 7-day period to allow the gut bacteria to adjust and reduce the risk of gas forming, as per the guide below:
  - Day 1 and 2: 25% new diet, 75% old diet
  - Day 3 and 4: 50% new diet, 50% old diet
  - Day 5 and 6: 75% new diet, 25% old diet
  - Day 7 and beyond: 100% new diet
- avoid or at least monitor the feeding of bones closely
- feed as close to the ground as possible.

If you are concerned about GDV and the risk to your pet, see your local vet for a health check-up and to talk through any concerns.

REMEMBER

GDV is a veterinary EMERGENCY. Seek veterinary treatment immediately if you suspect your pet has GDV.