

Ask A Vet: Bloat May be a Serious Risk for Your Dog

Sunday, May 10, 2015

Dear Dr. Weldy's,

My husband and I recently purchased a Great Dane puppy. The breeder we got him from said we have to be careful of him bloating when he gets older and we may want to have a surgery done to prevent it. What exactly is bloat and is this surgery necessary?

Dear Reader,

Bloat or severe distention of the stomach is a common issue affecting large breed dogs such as your Great Dane. In many cases, the stomach not only distends but then twists, causing further complications and death within a few hours time. This is called Gastric Dilatation and Volvulus, or GDV. It is not known exactly what causes bloat or GDV, but often times it is preceded by large meals or heavy exercise. It is one of the most well known and serious emergencies in veterinary medicine. Understanding your dog is at risk and being able to recognize the symptoms are critical to avoiding a very deadly consequence.

Some of the most important risk factors are breed and body type. Large dogs that are deep-chested are at risk. Namely the Great Dane, St. Bernard, Weimaraner, Irish Setter, GSD, and other similarly built breeds. However, it is important to note that bloat can occur to any breed or type of dog. Other risk factors include eating too fast, eating from a raised food bowl, eating only one meal a day, older age, male dogs, and dogs that are nervous or aggressive.

Since bloat can become dangerous so quickly, it is important to recognize the signs and quickly get your dog to a veterinarian. Some of these signs include a distended rib cage or stomach, vomiting or retching continually, and a hunched uncomfortable stance. Once it is recognized your veterinarian can release the gas from the stomach with either a stomach tube or needle. Other supportive care such as IV fluids are also important. Often emergency surgery is then performed to complete the decompression. In many cases a procedure called a gastropexy is performed. This tacks the stomach in its correct position so it cannot twist in the future. Sometimes gastropexy is done strictly for preventative reasons when high risk dogs are still young.

While owning a large or giant breed dog is rewarding in many ways, one must be aware of some of the special concerns such as bloat.

-Dr. Justin Sellon