

Your dog and bloat

After a huge Thanksgiving feast, inevitably we humans say, "I ate too much, I'm bloated!" This is easy enough to address. Pop an antacid, watch some football, and then go for another slice of pumpkin pie. However, bloat is not as innocent or as easy to treat for dogs. Bloat is a dangerous and potentially fatal disease that requires immediate medical attention.

Bloat can manifest in two different ways. The first is where excessive food or gas fill and stretch a dog's stomach (gastric dilation), and the second is where the stretched stomach twists on itself trapping gas inside (gastric dilation and volvulus). In both cases, the abdomen eventually becomes distended, putting pressure on the diaphragm and making it difficult to breathe. This abdominal distention will slow returning blood flow to the heart and stomach causing tissue death and potentially shock.

Adult and senior large breed dogs with deep chests, like mastiffs and great danes, are more predisposed to bloat, but that doesn't mean your chihuahuas are off the hook! Although less likely, bloat has been reported in every breed and can happen at any age. Age and breed are not the only factors to consider. Dogs that gulp their food, eat only one large meal a day, or are allowed to participate in heavy exercise close to meals tend to be at higher risk. Dogs that have experienced bloat once are more likely to bloat again.

But bloat does not have to be a reactive disease, there is a way to be proactive too! A surgical procedure called a gastropexy can be performed to aid in preventing bloat. With a gastropexy, a veterinarian will suture your dog's stomach to the chest cavity wall to prevent it from twisting. While it is not a guarantee your dog won't ever experience bloat, this procedure helps minimize the risk. Gastropexy surgery is often combined with other abdominal surgeries. For example, your veterinarian may recommend a gastropexy at the time of your dog's spay if she's a high risk breed. This offers the extra piece of mind without having two separate anesthetic events.

If you have questions about bloat or if your dog is a candidate for a gastropexy, contact your veterinarian. Treating bloat in dogs is more than just chewing some Tums, but with help from your veterinary team, you can be proactive in combating this disease.