The Dangers of Bloat & Lifesaving Steps to   Prevent This Potentially Deadly Condition

A true emergency situation for your pet, commonly known as "bloat," develops when his or her stomach fills with air and ten twists. This internal turning as the stomach blows up with air essentially twists the entrance and exit from the stomach closed, so that there is no place for air to go. This condition mostly occurs in large, deep chested dogs in which there is more room internally for the enlarged stomach to turn and flip over. A dog that develops this condition often will have a very large abdomen and will look like he has swallowed a beach ball.

Early Signs & Symptoms

One of the first things a pet owner will notice in a pet that has developed bloat is that the animals is standing or moving around strangely and is trying to vomit. Nothing, however, is produced except, perhaps, some saliva or foam. Other common symptoms can include excessive drooling; weakness and staggering, whining; standing with legs spread apart; pale gums; rapid, short breaths; rapid heart rate; and, finally, collapse. If you note any of these symptoms, please get your pet to a veterinarian immediately; the clock is ticking, and this condition can be fatal. Bloat is a medical emergency that can lead to death in as little as two to four hours. Even with rapid emergency medical attention, as many as one in three dogs die as a result of this condition, which is medically known as "gastric volvulus-dilatation syndrome" or "GDV."

Minimizing Risk Factors

Although the exact cause of this condition is unknown, there are several risk factors that can be minimized to try and protect your pet from ever developing this condition. These risk factors include:

* Eating too quickly

* Eating only one meal a day

* Eating or drinking a large volume of food or water at one time.

* Exercising or being too active immediately following a meal

* Eating foods known to cause gas formation

Most of these factors can be controlled if the owner feeds his or her pets twice daily, does not allow exercise after a meal and does not permit the animal to eat or drink too much at one time or to drink a lot of water before or after a meal. Pet owners also can minimize risks by discouraging pets from rolling over or exercising for at least one hour after a meal and eliminating inappropriate foods that cause gas. For dogs that tend to gulp down their food, slow food consumption by dividing the meal into five parts and giving the dog one fifth of the meal every 10 minutes. There are also food bowls now available that have been specially designed with rubber columns that force dogs to eat more slowly by having to pick and lick the food from around the columns.

Who's at Risk?

Any dog who eats too fast can suffer this condition, but several breeds that are at a higher risk include the Great

Dane, Rottweiler, German shepherd, Boxer, and Labrador Retrievers. Knowing the symptoms to be on the lookout for and whether or not your dog's breed is more susceptible will allow you to seek treatment more quickly.

Seeking Veterinary Care

    Your veterinarian will probably take a radiograph to see if the stomach has, indeed, turned. A tube may have to be inserted down your dogs' throat to relieve the pressure. Sometimes the dilation is too advanced to pass a tube, and a needle is used. This is because the pressure of the swollen stomach can affect the organs and especially the blood flow to the organs, causing shock and leading to death. Surgery is required to correct a turned stomach, but is generally recommended in all cases, because during a surgical procedure, the stomach can be sutured to the side of the body to prevent a recurrence. In closing, be alert for the symptoms described here, but especially if you own an at-risk breed. Some owners of highly susceptible breeds protect their pets by having the preventative surgery (known as a gastropexy) performed...just to be safe. Discuss this option with your veterinarian if you have any questions or you think your dog may be at risk.