

Prophylactic Gastropexy (to help prevent GDV)

[Gastric dilatation-volvulus \(GDV\)](#) requires expensive emergency treatment and surgery, and is fatal in 5-40% of affected dogs, depending on the health of the stomach at the time of surgery. Breeds at highest risk for GDV include: Great Dane, Weimaraner, St. Bernard, Gordon Setter, Irish Setter, Standard Poodle, Irish Wolfhound, German Shepherd, and Doberman Pinscher. A familial tendency has been identified; individual dogs with a first-degree relative affected by GDV have substantially increased risk. The cause of GDV is poorly understood, but many affected dogs have a history of previous gastric dilatation or other gastrointestinal motility problems. Gastropexy is a surgical procedure to permanently attach the stomach to the inside of the body wall. Following GDV, gastropexy effectively prevents recurrent dilatation (bloating of the stomach) in ~95% of dogs. Recurrent volvulus (twisting of the stomach) after gastropexy is possible, but extremely rare.

Several studies have shown NO adverse effects from prophylactic (preventative) gastropexy in otherwise healthy adult dogs. In a recent study of prophylactic gastropexy in large-breed dogs with a history of recurrent dilatation or other GI motility disease, 80% showed improvement of signs and none developed GDV during 1 year of follow-up. Prophylactic gastropexy is strongly recommended in dogs with a history of gastric dilatation/bloating (to prevent progression to GDV), or in those with a first-degree relative affected by GDV. Prophylactic gastropexy is often considered in any dog of high-risk breed, even if there have been no clinical signs or any known family members affected by GDV. Middle-aged to older dogs are most often affected by GDV – each year that a dog of high-risk breed is alive, their risk for GDV increases dramatically. GDV is invariably fatal unless treated with emergency surgery, and even with the most advanced treatment some dogs do not survive. Because of the costs and risks associated with treatment for GDV, prophylactic gastropexy is often an attractive option in a young, healthy dog of a high-risk breed.

Prophylactic gastropexy can be performed as an elective procedure during any other abdominal surgery in an adult dog (ie. removal of intestinal foreign body or bladder stones) as long as the patient is sufficiently stable under anesthesia. It can also be performed at the time of a routine “spay” in young female dogs, though the incision is substantially longer than for the spay alone. If combining a gastropexy with spaying a large or giant-breed dog (those typically at risk for GDV), it is preferable to delay the procedure until the dog is near its expected adult size, though still before the first heat cycle. This is typically around 10 months of age, though specific recommendations vary. In dogs that do not otherwise require abdominal surgery, a minimally invasive technique - laparoscopic-assisted gastropexy – is an attractive option. In this procedure, there are only a few small skin incisions.