

Volunteer's View

Jane Campagne

MY FOSTER, VINNY

After fostering for several years, I had my first and, I hope, last encounter with bloat a few months ago. Bloat, stomach torsion, twisted stomach... I had heard it mentioned, but I never paid much attention. I did everything right, didn't I? I wet their food, dolloped yogurt, had raised bowls, the dogs didn't exercise before or after eating (if ever!). As I heard the tales, somehow it seemed suspect to me. "Just happened?" How could it just happen? Something else must be going on. How judgmental I was! As I found out, "just happen" it does!

Now, back to my foster, Vinny. He was my foster dog a couple of years ago until he was adopted into Steve and Dana's wonderful home. I am lucky to have Vinny as a houseguest when they travel. Now, I know Vinny pretty well - I'm like his second mom. All the dogs sleep on the floor of my bedroom, and one night, I heard him get up in the wee hours of the morning (about 2:45). He coughed several times like he was trying to clear his throat. He then proceeded out the doggie door. Vinny is no night marauder. He likes his beauty sleep! So, after a couple of times in and out of the doggie door, I was up to check out what was going on - this was weird. He was

outside looking a bit out of sorts. He was acting like he wanted to poop, but couldn't. At the same time, he was trying to stretch down on his front legs. He then started to cough again. I took him by the collar into the living room to get a better look. He lied down... I lied down with him. I looked into his eyes, and I swear I heard this voice say to me in my

head "I'm going to die." I got up, threw some clothes on, and called the emergency vet to say, "I'm on my way." I picked Vinny up, carried him to my car, and off we went. I didn't bother to stop for lights unless I had to for a car or two. After all, it was three o'clock in the morning - the cops could follow me to the vet's if they wanted to! The point: it was only about 30 minutes since he had first gotten up, and as I arrived at the vet's, I was amazed at how much his condition had deteriorated. He was retching and retching, spitting up only foam. His stomach had grown and gotten hard as a drum. I couldn't believe it! It seemed like hours passed until the vet came in, took an x-ray, and came back with the diagnosis... bloat.

This story has a happy ending: Vinny is back to normal. We were lucky - no damage to the stomach or other organs. Most are not that lucky. As I think back on that night, I can think of no risk factors except that, as a greyhound, he is a deep chested dog. Even the vet who performed the surgery said he had only a very little liquefied food left in his stomach. After all, he had eaten at 6:30pm, gone to sleep at 10:30pm. He had been asleep for hours before ever even getting up. I came to the conclusion that "it just happens." So, please, if your hound or any other dog has any of the symptoms I've described... don't wait! Take them for care ASAP. Time will be on your side.

FROM THE TEXTBOOK OF VETERINARY INTERNAL MEDICINE:

Gastric dilatation-volvulus (bloat, stomach torsion, twisted stomach) is the result of the stomach twisting after becoming bloated with gases. The twisting causes the blood supply to be shut off to the stomach, and the bloating causes pressure on the heart and lungs.

Treatment is successful if owners recognize the signs: the abdomen becomes drum tight, loss of appetite, frequent retching, abdominal pain, distress, and eventual collapse.

Your vet will relieve the bloat by releasing the gases, either with a

needle into the stomach or tube down the throat. When the dog is stable, surgery will return the stomach to the normal position, and the vet will suture the stomach to the abdomen to prevent it from twisting again, since there is an 80% chance of recurrence.

Some studies suggest risk increases with: one meal per day, eating faster, nervous temperaments, exercising with a full stomach, and stressful events.