



## Spot News: February 2009

Health and Education: BLOAT Murphy's Experience  
February Birthdays

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**HEALTH AND EDUCATION** BLOAT (*Gastric dilation and volvulus*)  
**Three weeks ago Murphy, my 6 ½ year old Shepard/lab cross got bloat.** He has survived this life threatening emergency, but given the mortality rate and severity of this I felt it imperative to share my personal experience with you so you too can recognize the early signs of bloat and seek the emergency care your dog needs.

We had a normal day at daycare, we went home, Summer and Murphy were fed their dinner out on our deck. All routine and normal. After about ½ hour I went to call them in but only Summer came. I just thought Murphy was out chewing a bone. I went back out to call him and again he did not come. Weird and a change in behavior because he usually comes in after dinner. Not normal. I went to check on him and found him standing in the garden with stiff spread-legged, head hanging down, with unproductive retching. I went up to him and collected him by his collar to bring him inside and it was then I saw that his stomach was completely distended like he had swallowed a basketball! I felt it and it was hard like a drum. He tried to retch again but to no avail. Although I have taken DOGSAFE, the Canine First Aid Course, I had not seen a bloated dog before but knew that given Murphy's behavior change coupled with his distended stomach that something was not right.

I called the closest vet hospital to my house but they could not take him and said for me to take him to the Vancouver Animal Emergency Clinic at 4<sup>th</sup> and Fir in Vancouver and off we headed. Fortunately Murphy was able to walk to my car - he is 90lbs and I was by myself!. The 25 minute drive felt like forever, (even though I was going 100k/hr and yelling at cars to get out of my way) because I could see Murphy was in tremendous pain (not getting comfortable, restless, shallow rapid breathing) and knew also that bloat was so serious that he could collapse or worse on the trip to the ER.

The Hospital took Murphy in right away, x-rayed his stomach and assessed him. This is what the vet then explained to me. Yes Murphy not only had *gastric dilatation* (bloat) but *volvulus* which is when the distended stomach rotates on its long axis causing fluid and air to be trapped in the closed off stomach as well cutting off blood and oxygen to vital organs. Because the spleen is attached to the wall of the stomach it had rotated along with his stomach. The enlarged stomach was pressing on major blood vessels carrying blood back to his heart and that this could send Murphy into shock. There was also a possibility his stomach tissue

might be dying because it was stretched so tightly and couldn't allow blood circulation through it. Adding to all this was the pain he was in causing his heart rate to increase and possibly to heart failure.

To save Murphy's life they needed to perform emergency surgery to untwist Murphy's stomach and then if that all went well do a *gastropexy* which is suturing the wall of the stomach to the abdominal wall to prevent future reoccurrence of twisting. As with any surgery there are many inherent risks, but I was also told Murphy could potentially lose part of his stomach, his spleen, go into cardiac arrest just to name a few. Any or all of which greatly increased his potential rate of mortality. Unbelievably scary given just an hour before he was fine and even two days before we were snowshoeing up at Seymour.

I signed the papers to authorize whatever they needed to do and then waited. After two hours the vet called and Murphy had survived the surgery and did not lose any organs. Huge relief to say the least but he was still not out of the woods yet as the next 24 hours were still of concern given the severity.

By the next day he was doing much better. His heart rhythm was normal, something that apparently would not have been present until the next day and could have increased his mortality rate if not stabilized. All other drugs were doing what they needed to do and he was responding well. Crazy thing was the hospital told me I could come and pick him up later that night, only 24 hours after all this had happened and a major surgery like that! If it had been a person we would have had to stay in the hospital for up to 2 weeks.

Needless to say Murphy was clearly not his usual self for about a week after. All drugged up, a 20cm incision and 29 staples. Milestones for us over the next couple of days were when he got his appetite back and pooped again. For the next 10 days I did not let him out of my site. He started to play again with Summer after 11 days and after 13 days his staples were taken out. All in all the costs involved came in just under \$5000, but Murphy is back to his normal protecting and patrolling self.

### **This is what I have learned:**

Because I caught Murphy's change in behavior early, which suggested to me something was wrong and got him to emergency care in time, his internal organs such as his spleen and part of his stomach did not suffer from necrosis (cell death) and were not damaged nor in need of removing. Time was of the essence!

- Bloat can occur in any dog at any age.
- Large breed dogs with deep chests are anatomically predisposed such as Great Danes, Sheperds, Labs, Standard Poodle, Boxers. But my vet said she has seen a dachshund and Chihuahua get bloat before.
- Bloat develops suddenly, usually in a healthy, active dog.
- Bloat strikes within minutes without warning and can kill within just hours or less.
- A dog with a bloated, twisted stomach will die in pain in a matter of hours unless drastic steps are taken.
- No one knows conclusively what causes bloat. Apparently dogs with deep, narrow chests are more susceptible; however it could be any or none of the following: age, stress, heredity, eating too fast, drinking too much after a meal, exercising before or after eating, or an anxious disposition.

- Classically, a dog who bloated had eaten a large meal and exercised heavily shortly thereafter, according to [www.veterinarypartner.com](http://www.veterinarypartner.com)
- But this was not the case with Murphy, he just ate as usual and the bloated!

### **Be Prepared**

- Who are you going to call and where are you going to take your dog if this or any other emergency should arise?
- If you cannot lift your dog or do not have transportation what is your plan? Time is of the essence!
- In all cases where there is the slightest suspicion of bloat, take your dog at once to a veterinary hospital.
- Take the DOGSAFE Canine First Aid course and learn what to do in any emergency involving your dog. [www.DOGSAFE.CA](http://www.DOGSAFE.CA). This is an amazing course that all my staff at A Spot For Spot has taken and one I highly recommend to all dog owners and dog professionals.
- Know your dog and if there is a behavioral change take action.

I really hope my sharing Murphy's scary experience has taught you about bloat and its seriousness; I know I sure learned a lot. If you, the **SPOT** readers, ever have a personal experience that you wish to share that can educate all of us and save dogs lives please email me at [kate@aspotforspot.ca](mailto:kate@aspotforspot.ca). I will try to pass your experiences in our monthly newsletters to help all dog owners give their dogs a healthier, happier and better life!

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**February Birthdays:** Bear Seppanen, Emma Phillips, Gracey Price, Kelly Lacey, Sophie Moses, Stella Mastrangelo, Josie Gazeley, Stella Black, Cassius Lund Chow, Watson Ashworth, Mika White, Lola Bastien, Shelby Lincoln, Piper Rayess, Cody Law, Moe Turner, Patch Lindsay, Mowgli Lewis, Emmi Morris, Peanut Morris, Tichi Knoph, Loki Middleton, Gabi Shum, Yumi Lee, Regan Maskerine, Pascal Villanueva, and Brecken Kleisinger. Come see us on your birthday for a free day of daycare. Happy Birthday!!

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## **LOVE & HEAD RUBS!!**

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