

## CLIENT EDUCATION HANDOUT

OPTIONAL  
LOGO

Customer Name, Street Address, City, State, Zip code

Phone number, Alt. phone number, Fax number, e-mail address, web site

### Bloat (Ruminal)

#### Overview

Although abdominal distension can occur for many reasons in ruminants, most commonly “bloat” refers to distension within the rumen. Two types are possible: frothy and free gas bloat. Frothy bloat occurs when gas within the rumen is trapped in froth and the animal cannot release it through normal eructation (burping). Free gas bloat occurs secondary to a physical blockage such as a foreign body (i.e., potato) or enlarged lymph nodes or from dysfunction of the vagal nerve. Although bloat occurs in less than 1% of the population, frothy bloat can drastically increase in herds grazing legumes or being fed large amounts of highly fermentable carbohydrates (i.e., finely ground grains).

#### Species and Animal Groups Affected

All ruminant species. Young ruminants are unlikely to develop true rumen bloat pre-weaning; however, bloat may occur if milk is shunted inappropriately to the rumen or may develop during the transition to forage. Bloat within the abomasum of milk-fed youngstock is a separate issue and must be treated immediately.

#### Signs

- Distension of the **left** flank. This may feel soft in early stages progressing to very firm.
- High heart rate (>90/beats per minute), difficulty breathing and weakness due to impaired blood return from the abdomen.
- Abdominal discomfort shown as teeth grinding, kicking at abdomen, lying down etc.
- If bloat is associated with the vagal nerve the lower right flank will be distended and soft due to fluid accumulation within the abomasum.

#### Causes

- Feed related (immature legumes or clover, high carbohydrate diet)
- Blockage of esophagus
- Vagal nerve dysfunction (secondary to chronic pneumonia, masses, etc.)

#### Treatment

- Pass a stomach tube to relieve bloat. If frothy bloat is present only a minimal amount of gas will pass. If a foreign body is stuck in the esophagus the tube will not easily pass into the rumen.
- In the case of frothy bloat, oral surfactants must be given to break apart the surface tension in the froth and release the gas. Ex: Therabloat (poloxalene) and mineral oil.
- In severe cases when animals are close to death it may be necessary to directly enter the rumen by making a stab incision in the left flank (a hand width below the short ribs and in front of the hip bone). This is the last resort as it will result in an abdominal infection from rumen contents leaking into the abdomen.

#### Management Considerations

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*Blackwell's 5-Minute Veterinary Consult: Ruminant 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.*

- Make all feed changes gradually and avoid feeding high amounts of early legumes. If pastures are rich in legumes or clovers animals should be given grass hay prior to entering these pastures to decrease their feed consumption rate.
- Bloat prevention aids are available in the form of slow-release rumen capsules, lick blocks, and water and hay treatments.

### **Expected Course and Prognosis**

- Good prognosis with prompt treatment. Prognosis is poorer if chronic or associated with underlying vagal nerve dysfunction.

## Notes

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