



8 Great Dane Health Issues You Should Be Aware Of

Our review process.

Great Danes may be a giant breed, but they're gentle giants. These clumsy, playful dogs can fill a place in your heart and bring you so much joy. Unfortunately, there are some common health problems you should know about.



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5 Common Health Problems

Great Danes are known for their [intelligence](#), [low energy](#) and [guard-like behavior](#). Unfortunately, this giant breed only averages a lifespan of [6 to 8 years](#), with the average mature age of 3-years-old, so it's important that you know what health issues may arise so you can help your dog live as long as possible.

Gastric Torsion

The most common killer for Great Danes is Gastric Torsion, also known as canine bloat. When humans overeat or eat too fast, we may become bloated and gassy. Fortunately, we can recover quickly from this with minimal discomfort. Dogs are not as lucky and canine bloat can become life threatening quickly.

As food passes through a dog's stomach, gas builds up and the stomach expands. If the stomach stretches beyond its limits, blood circulation to the heart is prevented as well as to the stomach. Lack of blood circulation to the stomach results in stomach tissue dying.

The stomach can begin to twist at the top and bottom, which prevents the gas from moving out of the stomach. The stomach experiences extreme damage that is unreparable. If caught early enough, the dog can receive emergent care to help relieve the gas buildup.

However, it is often difficult to catch bloat early on, and it is often too late to help the dog, which is why it is a common fatal disease. Dogs can die within hours of bloat beginning, so it's essential to act fast if you think your dog is experiencing it. [Learn More About Canine Bloat.](#)

Symptoms

- Different personality wise and physically
- Stomach appears larger, distended and hard
- Lack of normal digestive sounds (place your ear on your dog's stomach and note if there is any difference)
- Standing in a hunched over position, unable to get comfortable
- Refuses to lay on their side
- Dry heaving, vomiting foam or mucus
- Anxious
- Pacing
- Whining
- Licking the air
- Looking at their abdomen
- Standing with their legs spread
- Shallow breathing
- Weak pulse
- Collapsing to the ground
- Cold gums that are dark red (or blue or white in later stages)
- Attempt to defecate but unable to

Treatment

Take your dog to the vet immediately. Depending on how soon you catch the onset of bloat will determine the vet's course of treatment.

If the stomach is not twisted, your vet may place a small tube down the dog's throat (while they are sedated) to help gas be removed from the stomach.

If the stomach is twisted, surgery will most likely take place, and the vet will make an incision into the dog's stomach to relieve gas pressure. The vet may also staple your dog's stomach in place, so if this occurs

again, the stomach cannot expand.

After either course of treatment, your dog should undergo a complete physical to make sure no severe damage occurred. Stomach tissue may need to be removed to preserve the stomach function. Your vet may recommend having an anti-gas medication on hand for your dog.

Hip Dysplasia

Hip dysplasia often manifests itself in larger dog breeds and Great Danes fit the bill. Hip dysplasia is a chronic condition in which the head of the femur bone doesn't fit into the hip socket correctly. If you adopt a Great Dane from a breeder, ask for radiographs of the parents' hips and speak to them about the parents' health history. [Learn More About Hip Dysplasia.](#)

Symptoms

- Pain or discomfort during exercise
- Lameness
- Stiff back legs
- "Bunny hop" like run
- Stiffness getting up or running
- Difficulty getting up
- Muscle tone loss in back legs
- Lack of enjoyment with physical activities that were previously enjoyable

Treatment

Your vet will probably do an x-ray to view the dog's hip sockets and make an appropriate diagnosis with a treatment plan.

Cardiomyopathy

Cardiomyopathy causes the heart to enlarge and is most likely genetic.

Symptoms

Unfortunately, cardiomyopathy commonly goes undiagnosed until the dog dies. However, if you notice any of the symptoms below, take them to the vet immediately.

- Lethargy
- Weight loss
- Weakness
- Coughing

- Increased heart rate
- Difficult breathing
- Abdominal distention
- Difficulty exercising
- Decreased appetite
- Less happy and more depressed

Treatment

Several drugs are used to treat the symptoms of dilated cardiomyopathy (DCM).

- Diuretics – remove excess fluid from the body
 - Angiotensin converting enzyme inhibitors – lower blood pressure
 - Cardiac glycosides – slow heart rate and strengthen heart contractions
 - Vasodilators – dilate the arteries and veins so the heart doesn't have to work as hard
 - Bronchodilators – help a dog with DCM breathe easier
 - Pimobendan – lowers the pressure in arteries and veins and improves the heart muscle strength
 - Anti-arrhythmic drugs – helps control arrhythmias
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Tricuspid Valve Disease

Tricuspid valve disease is a congenital condition where the heart valve doesn't function correctly. As a result, the left side of your dog's heart may fail.

Symptoms

- Distended stomach
- Decrease in exercise ability
- Difficulty breathing
- Heart murmur
- Increased heartbeat
- Weakness

Treatment

If there is a large amount of fluid in the dog's heart, the vet may remove some fluid. The dog will probably be placed on a low salt diet, and overweight dogs will be encouraged to lose weight. Moderate activity is okay, but your dog should avoid exertion.

The vet may suggest some supplements and vitamins such as:

- Vitamin D
- Coenzyme CoQ10
- Omega 3

Other medications that may be prescribed include:

- Digoxin
- Furosemide
- Angiotensin enzyme inhibitor

These treatments can improve your dog's quality of life. If they are not responding to treatment, your vet may refer them to a cardiac vet specialist and surgery may be considered to replace the valve.

Cancer

Osteosarcoma, or bone cancer, is commonly diagnosed in Great Danes.

Symptoms

- Lumps in various part of the body
- Swelling
- Lameness
- Joint or bone pain
- Tired
- Anorexia

Treatment

Depends on the stage of the disease, the dog's age, etc. Your vet will talk with you about a course of treatment for your dog.

3 Common Pet Insurance Claims Filed With Petplan

According to [Petplan](#), Great Danes are also commonly treated for the following conditions.

Addison's Disease

Also known as hypoadrenocorticism, Addison's disease forms from the decrease in corticosteroid secretion from the adrenal gland. (If there was an increase of this hormone, your dog may have [Cushing's disease](#).) [Petplan](#) averages a claim of \$1,287 for Addison's disease.

Symptoms

- Common in young to middle-aged female dogs
- Lethargy
- Anorexia
- Vomiting
- Muscle weakness

Treatment

The [most common treatment](#) is replacing the mineralocorticoids and glucocorticoids in the body. Florinef is commonly prescribed and given twice per day.

Blood sodium and potassium levels are monitored to determine the correct dose for the dog. After the dog is regulated, the levels are reached 2 to 30 times per year and adjustments are made as necessary.

Another treatment option is an injection of DOCP, which is administered every 25 days. It is known to regulate better than Florinef. Prednisone may also be prescribed to your dog in conjunction with DOCP.

Wobbler Syndrome

Also known as cervical spondylomyelopathy (CSM), wobbler syndrome affects the cervical spine at the neck and is common in large breeds. The term wobbler syndrome comes from the wobbly walk that presents itself in dogs who have it. [Petplan](#) claims for wobbler syndrome average \$3,866.

Symptoms

- Wobbly gait
- Stiff neck
- Weakness
- Shorter stride
- Weak front limbs
- Partial or complete paralysis
- Muscle loss near shoulders
- Scuffed nails from uneven walking
- Difficulty getting up

Treatment

Depending on the severity and location of the spinal compression, your vet may or may not recommend surgery. Your dog may be put on bed rest and need to be moved to their other side every 4 hours to prevent bed sores. A catheter may be inserted to allow the dog to rest.

If medically treated, activity may be restricted for more than 2 months. Surgery is commonly looked at as the best option, but there are complications that you should ask your vet about. Physical therapy will most likely be suggested for post-op dogs to avoid further damage and to help recover.

Cruciate Ligament Tears

[Petplan](#) claims are an average of \$3,543 for cranial cruciate ligament (CCL) tears. CCL tears are the equivalent of ACL tears in humans. Cruciate ligaments are found in the hind legs of dogs and may be partial or complete tears.

Symptoms

- Limping in hind legs
- Awkward posture standing, sitting or lying down
- Difficulty getting up
- Swelling around the knee

Treatment

Treatment often entails surgery, which can be rather [expensive](#) if you don't have [pet insurance](#). [Learn More About CCL Tears](#).

How To Avoid High Vet Bills

We know you'll always do what you think is best for your dog and care for them as you see fit. However, are you looking out for your wallet when pet emergencies arise? Those claim amounts weren't anything to shrug off.

Unfortunately, pet parents are often faced with difficult decisions of choosing to treat their dog and pay for an expensive vet bill, not getting the dog help because the costs are too high. In extreme cases, pet parents even decide to euthanize their best friend because they can't afford treatment. This is a situation we've heard of too many times, and it breaks our hearts that parents are faced with it.

That's why we recommend pet insurance, so when your dog is hurt and needs medical attention, your bank account isn't the deciding factor. You might be surprised to learn that the average pet insurance policy is less than \$35/month. Some are even less than \$20/month depending on the coverage options you choose. You can read reviews of pet insurance companies and get an idea of how much it might cost you by reading our [comparison of the top 3 pet insurance providers](#).

What has been the cause of your Great Dane's heftiest vet bill?

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