

BLOAT

Bloat is a build-up of gas in the rumen that cannot be released. It is a life-threatening condition for ruminants. If there is no intervention, the animal will die from respiratory failure. The three primary causes of bloat are eating too much wet forage, consuming large amounts of legumes, and eating too much concentrate. Some animals are more prone to bloat and should be culled. Small ruminants can get three kinds of bloat: frothy, free-gas, and abomasal.



Frothy bloat, also called pasture bloat, is primarily seen in the spring and fall due to animals overeating lush, legume-dominant pastures in the vegetative and early bud stages. It can also be caused by eating too much wet grass.

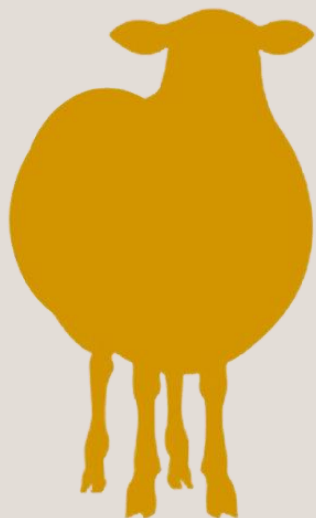


Free-gas bloat, also called grain or feedlot bloat, usually occurs when animals suddenly eat large amounts of grain, especially wheat and barley, before the rumen has had a chance to adapt to the high digestibility of the feed. An obstruction in the throat or esophagus can also prevent gas from escaping.



Abomasal bloat is usually only seen in bottle-fed lambs/kids. Poor hygiene and intermittent feeding of large volumes of milk are potential causes.

Often the first sign of bloat is sudden death. Otherwise, the main symptom is a swollen left abdomen. Other signs include loss of appetite, pain, discomfort, teeth grinding, and respiratory distress.



Treatment depends upon the type of bloat and the severity of symptoms. The early stages of bloat can be treated with antacids. Walking the animal around and massaging the rumen may help. Mineral and vegetable oils can be used as antifoaming agents for frothy bloat. A stomach tube can help to release gas. In extreme cases of bloat, the last resort is to use a trochar or even a needle to puncture the rumen and relieve the gas.

Prevention of bloat includes use of non-bloating legumes, pasture mixtures with legumes making up no more than 50% of available forage, limiting access to legume-dominated pastures, not turning livestock onto wet pastures (or rotating to new paddocks in the afternoon), and feeding dry hay first thing in the morning. Ionophores may aid in the prevention of bloat. Grain bloat can be prevented with gradual changes in the diet, not feeding too finely ground grain, and supplemental long-stem roughage.