

Hypothyroidism

A common disease in dogs.

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Hypothyroidism is the most common endocrine disease of the dog and is caused by a decrease in the thyroid hormone production. The thyroid hormones are produced by the thyroid glands in the neck and influence the metabolism of most of the body's cells and organs. Decreased production of these hormones is usually caused by inflammation or shrinking (atrophy) of the glands. Rarely, certain congenital conditions, tumors, or pituitary disorders may be the cause. As a result of the hormone deficiency, cells and organs function at a slower rate. This decrease in metabolic rate can cause a variety of clinical signs.

Although any breed can be affected, some breeds are predisposed to hypothyroidism and include: Golden Retrievers, Doberman Pinschers, Boxers, and Cocker Spaniels. Hypothyroidism is extremely rare in cats and usually results from treatment for hyperthyroidism.

Clinical signs of hypothyroidism are diverse and may range from mild to severe. While the various signs are too numerous to list, most dogs develop certain skin conditions, lethargy, and weight gain. The most common skin conditions are hair loss, hair color/quality change, and predisposition to skin infections. Because of the decreased metabolic rate most dogs are lethargic, dull, become weak after exercise, and gain weight easily.

Diagnosis of hypothyroidism usually requires a thorough exam by a veterinarian along with simple blood tests to determine thyroid hormone concentrations. In some instances, additional tests may be needed to determine whether the deficiency is due to a gland problem or other medications or diseases. And, sometimes a trial therapy with hormone supplements is needed to confirm the diagnosis.

Hypothyroidism is an easily treatable disease that involves giving synthetic thyroid hormone, usually twice daily, for the life of the animal. While it may take several weeks for all of the clinical signs to resolve, an improvement in activity level and attitude is usually seen within 1-2 weeks. It is very important to have the thyroid levels re-evaluated 1-2 months after the treatment is initiated and on a yearly basis thereafter. This insures that the dose of the synthetic hormone is appropriate.

If your dog is showing any signs of hypothyroidism, please contact us.