



Hypothyroidism in Dogs

Hypothyroidism is a disease of the thyroid glands which causes an insufficient production of thyroid hormone. The thyroid glands are two small glands located in the neck. The decreased activity of the thyroid gland is often related to a malfunctioning immune system or thyroid atrophy, in which the functional thyroid tissue is gradually replaced by fatty tissue. When there is a decreased production of thyroid hormone, clinical symptoms will develop.

Clinical Signs:

- 1.) Hypothyroidism is most often seen in middle aged to older dogs.
- 2.) The start of clinical symptoms is usually very gradual. The most consistent symptoms are related to the generalized slowing of the metabolic rate. The hypothyroid dog tires easily and sleeps more. As the condition progresses, mental activity slows and the dog becomes less interested in playing. The body temperature drops so the dog may seek out warm areas. Many times there is an unexplained weight gain that does not respond well to changing diet and increasing exercise.
- 3.) Changes in the skin and coat are common. Initially there is drying of the coat and hair and excessive shedding. This may progress to hair loss on the sides of the body, back of the legs, the bottom of the neck and sometimes on top of the nose.
- 4.) In dogs that have not been neutered or spayed, infertility of both the male and female can be seen.

Diagnosis:

The diagnosis of hypothyroidism is made through a blood test. If this test is found to be low for thyroid hormone, treatment is started by giving tablets twice a day. Improvement in the symptoms should be seen in 4-6 weeks. Monitoring with a blood test is necessary to see if the level of thyroid hormone that you are giving is adequate. Thyroid levels should be rechecked 2 weeks after starting the medication, then again in 6 months. Depending on the results and how the dog is doing, levels should then routinely be checked every 6-12 months. Occasionally a complete medical work up may be recommended to evaluate the overall health of your pet.

Treatment:

Treatment of hypothyroidism is necessary for the lifetime of the dog but fortunately the medication is relatively inexpensive and the benefits are great. There are very few side effects to the medication when supplemented at the correct dosage.