

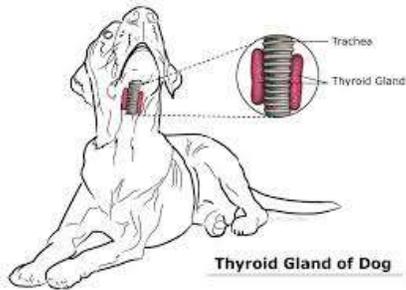


Hypothyroidism in Dogs

Hypothyroidism is a disease defined as lower than normal thyroid hormone levels in the blood. The body usually isn't making enough of the thyroid hormone called thyroxine. It can be life threatening if not properly treated. It is a common condition in dogs but is rare in cats.

Thyroxine

Thyroxine (T4) is a natural hormone produced by the thyroid, a small endocrine gland located near the larynx (Adam's apple). The brain releases hormones that stimulate the thyroid gland to produce thyroxine. Circulating thyroxine (T4) converts to triiodothyronine (T3) in body tissues and organs in order for it to be used. These thyroid hormones influence many biological functions including metabolism, body temperature, blood cell production, and more.



Signs and Diagnosis

You may notice your dog is less energetic, listless, and uninterested in favorite activities. Hypothyroidism can also result in significant weight gain, with no change in diet. The hypothyroid dog is normally intolerant of cold, preferring warm areas.

Skin changes are typical, resulting in thickened, dry, and scaly patches. The coat will often become dry, patchy, and thinning often around the tail and over the back.



There can also be neurological as well as other signs. Upon physical exam, your veterinarian may notice a slow heart rate.

A blood test can easily determine whether the thyroid level is normal. Other blood tests will help determine whether another condition may be causing the signs your dog is showing. Other diseases can also reduce the thyroid level so we need to determine which came first.

Causes

The majority of cases appear to be associated with an immune condition. In other words, the body is destroying its own thyroid gland. We usually don't know why this happens. Some breeds of dogs are more prone to the disease including Golden Retrievers, Doberman Pinschers, Greyhounds, Irish Setters, and others. Hypothyroidism is more commonly diagnosed as dogs get older.



Treatment

Treatment is simple and effective with an oral thyroid hormone replacement medicine, levothyroxine. After 4 weeks, we test the thyroid levels again to evaluate your dog's response to the medicine. At this time, the doctor may decide to change the dose. Because each dog responds differently to treatment, this procedure may be necessary two or three times to find the optimal dose. After that, an annual checkup and thyroid blood test is all that is required.

Summary

Thyroid hormone replacement treatment is a simple but lifelong therapy. Supplementation gives your dog the hormones he is missing so he can continue to live a normal life.