



Hypothyroidism

Also called:

- Low thyroid

What is hypothyroidism?

Hypothyroidism is a condition that affects dogs at any time during their adulthood. It results from a gradual, progressive loss of the function of the dog's thyroid gland. The thyroid gland is the site of production and storage of thyroid hormone. This hormone is crucial for many normal functions of the body. It provides the signal for increasing the body's metabolic rate and activity.

In most cases, we do not know why the thyroid gland's function decreases. Since the condition appears to have a hereditary component, we recommend not breeding affected dogs.

What are the signs that a dog may be hypothyroid?

Because the thyroid hormone affects many of the body's functions, hypothyroid dogs can show a combination of one or more symptoms. The dog may appear to "slow down" his activity level, which can be mistaken for normal aging. He may not tolerate long walks or be interested in playing, preferring to sleep for much of the day. He may also seek out warm places to lay. Some dogs seem to gain weight without showing an increase in appetite. Dogs with hypothyroidism often have skin problems, which is why we see them in a dermatology practice. They may get recurrent bacterial infections (pyoderma), dry skin, and hair loss. Testing for hypothyroidism is part of our diagnostic plan for many dermatology patients.

How is hypothyroidism diagnosed?

We diagnose hypothyroidism based on the clinical signs as well as a blood test.

How is hypothyroidism treated?

Hypothyroidism is treated with daily oral medications. The pills contain thyroid hormone, which is dosed according to your dog's weight. We always make sure that we are giving the correct dose of the medications by rechecking your dog's

thyroid blood levels about 4 weeks after starting therapy. This is the only way we can be sure that enough is being given to correct the skin problems, and that we are not giving enough to cause an overdose. Several signs may indicate that your dog may be receiving too much of the thyroid medication. These include panting, restlessness, and excessive urination. The levels need to be rechecked any time a dose adjustment is made.

If we have asked you to recheck your dog's thyroid levels after starting the supplement, please make the appointment for 4 to 6 hours after the time you normally give the morning dose. Give the pill at the normal time on the morning of the appointment.

Since hypothyroidism is not "cured" by the treatment, the oral medications need to be continued for life. With therapy, we can effectively prevent and reverse the changes in the skin and other organs that occur with this disease. Hypothyroid dogs have a normal life expectancy and do very well as long as their thyroid levels are maintained in the desired range.