

What to do for my dog's *underactive thyroid?*

Use this handout to learn more about what canine hypothyroidism is and what you can do to protect your dog's health.

Hypothyroidism is the most common hormonal disorder diagnosed in dogs. It occurs when the thyroid glands, located near the throat, are unable to produce enough thyroid hormone.

Thyroid hormone helps regulate and control normal bodily processes. In simple terms, it controls how fast or slow the body functions. When a dog's thyroid gland becomes underactive and produces too little thyroid hormone, it leads to a decrease in the body's metabolism.

The exact cause of hypothyroidism is not known. This disease can affect dogs of any age, male or female, and tends to be more common in larger breeds.

What are signs of hypothyroidism in my dog?

The most common symptom is:

- decrease in energy or activity level

This is a non-specific symptom that can also be present in a number of other diseases, so a comprehensive diagnostic work-up is important.

Other symptoms can include:

- weight gain without an increase in food consumption
- lethargy
- sensitivity to cold
- hair loss or excessive shedding
- recurring skin and/or ear infections

How is hypothyroidism diagnosed?

A physical examination is an important starting point to evaluate your pet's overall health. If changes are present on physical examination that cause your veterinarian to be concerned about hypothyroidism, they will recommend a diagnostic work-up to test thyroid function as well as to check for concurrent disease or dysfunction of other organs.

If your dog is found to have hypothyroidism, follow-up tests will be necessary on a regular basis to ensure medication remains at an appropriate dose so that thyroid hormone levels remain in a normal range.

- Chemistry tests to evaluate kidney, liver, and pancreatic function, as well as sugar levels
- A complete blood count to rule out blood-related conditions
- Electrolyte tests to ensure your dog is neither dehydrated nor suffering from an electrolyte imbalance
- One or more thyroid tests, which determines if the thyroid gland is producing too little thyroid hormone
- A urinalysis to rule out urinary tract infection and to evaluate the ability of the kidneys to concentrate urine

How can hypothyroidism be managed?

If your dog is diagnosed with hypothyroidism, your veterinarian will most likely discuss medication options for it.

Oral medication is the most common way of treating canine hypothyroidism. With daily doses of synthetic thyroxin, your dog's symptoms should resolve within several weeks and its metabolism should return to normal. This medication is inexpensive, well-tolerated, and usually given once or twice a day. Once your dog begins medication, they will most likely need continue taking it for the remainder of their life.

Your veterinarian will schedule periodic blood tests to measure the levels of thyroid hormone in your dog's body, so that the dosage can be monitored and adjusted, if necessary.

It is important to follow your veterinarian's directions for medication and follow-up testing – under-dosing means the disease progresses, damaging the heart and kidneys, and over-dosing could have fatal consequences. Medication must be given on a regular schedule to be effective.

When administered at an appropriate dose to patients requiring thyroid hormone replacement, there should not be any adverse effects associated with therapy. Adverse effects associated with overdosage include increased heart rate, high blood pressure, vomiting, diarrhea, drastic change in energy levels, hyperventillation, difficulty breathing, increased appetite, abnormally frequent urination, excitability, nervousness, and excessive panting. A single overdose is unlikely to cause severe adverse effects compared to chronic overdosage, which can be dangerous to your pet's health. This is why it is so important to bring your dog in on time for routing monitoring once the condition has been diagnosed.

The prognosis for canine hypothyroidism is generally quite good as long as treatment and follow-up recommendations are followed.

If you have any questions,
please call Cascade Vet Clinic at
(250) 295-0312.

Your veterinary team is ready to help!

