

HYPOTHYROIDISM IN DOGS

What is hypothyroidism?

Hypothyroidism is a common problem in dogs, but rarely occurs in cats. The thyroid gland consists of two lobes that sit like a saddle over the windpipe at the base of the neck. The gland is most well known for its role in controlling metabolism (the processes that repair and maintain the body) and body growth. Hypothyroidism results from an impaired production of the thyroid hormone, thyroxine. It is caused by the gradual deterioration of the thyroid gland – although it is not always clear why this happens.

Which dogs are most likely to get hypothyroidism?

Hypothyroidism most commonly develops in middle-aged dogs between the ages of 4 to 10 years. The disorder usually affects mid to large size dogs, although there are some breeds which seem to be more predisposed to developing the condition. These include Golden Retrievers, Doberman Pinschers, Irish Setters, Miniature Schnauzers, Dachshunds, Cocker Spaniels and Airedale Terriers. German Shepherds and dogs of mixed breed appear to be at a reduced risk of contracting the disease.

What are the symptoms?

Because the thyroid hormone is needed to drive the metabolism of all the cells in the body, the symptoms of deficiency can be extremely variable. There is no one specific symptom that points to hypothyroidism, but here are several symptoms that, when combined, will lead to a suspicion of the disease being present in your dog. These

symptoms include weight gain, obesity, hair loss and skin problems. Hypothyroidism is easy to diagnose with a simple blood test to check the level of hormones, but (because the condition can be hard to spot in the first place) many dogs suffer from a low thyroid hormone level for years without treatment.

How is hypothyroidism treated?

Fortunately, the treatment of this disease is easy and consists of putting the dog on a daily dose of a synthetic version of the thyroid hormone. The dose and frequency of administration of this drug will vary, depending on the severity of the disease and the individual response of the animal to the drug. A dog is usually placed on the standard dose for an animal of their weight, then blood samples are taken periodically to check their response and the dose adjusted accordingly. Once the therapy has been started, the dog will need to have treatment for the rest of his life. Usually though, after the treatment is started, the majority of the symptoms are resolved.

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