

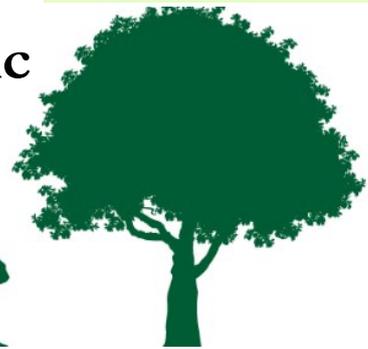
**Damory Veterinary
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Damory Veterinary Clinic

Small Animal Factsheet



CANINE HYPOTHYROIDISM

Animals have paired thyroid glands that are located in the neck, near to the voice box. They are responsible for producing thyroid hormone which works to maintain your dog's body working at the right rate. Dogs are susceptible to developing a condition called hypothyroidism which is due to a lack of production of thyroid hormone from these glands. Although more common in older dogs, it can also affect younger dogs. The condition can often be mistaken for dogs just slowing down with age.

Why is thyroid hormone important?

Thyroid hormone is essential for the normal functioning of the body, affecting almost all cells and organs. It is particularly important for controlling heart rate and the activity of cells. When there is more thyroid hormone the cells work harder and burn more energy, when there is less the whole body slows down.

Why is my dog not producing thyroid hormone?

The most common cause of hypothyroidism is an inflammatory process causing destruction of the gland or just because the gland atrophies/shrinks (idiopathic hypothyroidism). Tumours of the glands are rare.

How do I know if my dog has hypothyroidism?

The signs associated with a lack of thyroid hormone can be quite vague, which is why owners can mistake it for their dog just slowing down and getting a bit old. Dogs tend to slow down and generally have less energy and are reluctant to exercise the way they have previously. Their appetite is usually normal but you may notice that they put on weight despite being fed what they have always been fed. Other common signs associated with hypothyroidism are bald patches on their body, commonly symmetrically on their flanks and also on their tail, scurfy skin and sometimes dogs with long coats don't shed properly and get shaggy matted coats.

How do you diagnose hypothyroidism in my dog?

If your vet is suspicious your dog may be suffering from hypothyroidism due to the clinical signs previously mentioned and findings on a clinical exam they will usually recommend a routine blood profile, to include measuring the thyroid levels in the body. These are not always conclusive as sometimes other disease processes can cause a secondary lack of thyroid hormone but if we feel the blood tests support the primary diagnosis of hypothyroidism we will recommend starting treatment.

How can hypothyroidism be treated?

There is no treatment which can make your dog's thyroid gland start working again properly so treatment involves supplementing your dog with thyroid hormone and hence the treatment will be lifelong. The tablets are often given once or twice a day and follow up blood tests will be required to ensure the thyroid level in the blood stream is adequate. Once stabilized your dog will need to be checked by a vet every 6 months and blood tests may be needed to check thyroid levels are still ok.

What is the prognosis?

If your dog is suffering from primary hypothyroidism and stabilizes on the medication the prognosis is very good. Your dog should be happier within a few weeks of starting medication and you should see their energy levels improve. If they had other signs, such as skin disease, this should improve within a few months.