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Hypothyroidism

Hypothyroidism is the most common endocrine disease of dogs. It means that lower than normal levels of thyroid hormone is present in the bloodstream. Thyroid hormone has effects on virtually all bodily functions. Thyroid hormone is produced by the thyroid gland which is located on either side of the trachea in the neck region. The hypothalamus (a portion of the brain) sends a signal to the pituitary gland (another region of the brain) which then sends a signal to the thyroid gland when more thyroid hormone is needed. Usually the problem lies at the thyroid gland itself, i.e. it is incapable of producing enough hormone, even though it is being told by the brain to produce more.

Clinical symptoms:

Lethargy or mental dullness, weakness, cold intolerance, loss of hair, dull or rough haircoat, thickened skin, darkened skin, oily skin, dandruff, increase in body weight with normal or decreased food intake

Diagnosis:

Diagnosis is made by noticing the typical clinical signs, performing blood tests for confirmation, and evaluating response to therapy. Hypothyroidism can be difficult to accurately diagnose due to the wide variety of symptoms and less than 100% accuracy of the blood testing. Therefore, a combination of diagnostic tool must be used.

Treatment:

Supplementation of thyroid hormone is easily accomplished with an inexpensive tablet given once or twice daily.

Monitoring:

One month after instituting therapy, blood should be checked to be sure the dose is correct. Once the correct dose has been established, yearly testing is performed.