

Hypothyroidism in dogs

What is the thyroid gland and what does it do?

The thyroid gland is one of the most important glands in the body. It produces thyroid hormone which regulates the rate of metabolism (chemical processes) that occur in the body, controlling processes such as body temperature, heart function and hair growth.

What causes hypothyroidism?

There are two main causes for hypothyroidism in dogs. The most common is an inflammatory condition called lymphocytic thyroiditis. This is thought to occur due to the immune system attacking itself causing destruction of the thyroid gland. The second, less common cause is called idiopathic atrophy in which the thyroid gland shrinks in size. Both conditions reduce thyroid hormone production.

What are the symptoms?

Hypothyroidism usually affects medium to large breed dogs. Low thyroid hormone levels in the body result in a low metabolic rate, causing some of the following signs to develop:

- ❖ Weight gain without an increase in appetite
- ❖ Lethargy
- ❖ Exercise intolerance
- ❖ Heat seeking behaviour
- ❖ Dry hair with excessive shedding
- ❖ Hair thinning, sometimes baldness in certain areas
- ❖ Increased pigmentation in the skin
- ❖ Failure to re-grow hair after clipping or shaving

How is it diagnosed?

General blood tests usually show non-specific signs such as anaemia, high cholesterol and high muscle enzymes. Although commonly related to hypothyroidism they do not confirm the presence of the disease.

A much more useful test is the 'T4/TSH' blood test. T4 is a hormone produced from the thyroid gland and TSH is a hormone that stimulates its production. The two values together are able to give us an indication of how well the thyroid gland is functioning. This involves taking a small amount of blood from your dog, which takes approximately 5 to 10 minutes, and sending it to an external lab for evaluation.

Can it be treated?

Yes, hypothyroidism is treatable but not curable. The goal of treatment is once daily

supplementation with a synthetic thyroid hormone that mimics the effect of natural thyroid hormone. This is usually given for the rest of the dog's life. Regular check-ups are required to ensure the correct dose is given and clinical signs are under control. Cost will vary depending on the size of your dog and the amount of medication required, so is best discussed on an individual basis.

Please feel free to contact the surgery should you have any further questions about your dog's condition.