

ORAH Info:

Canine hypothyroidism



Dogs with low thyroid hormone levels are often described as “couch potatoes,” and have trouble losing weight. However, low thyroid levels have also been linked to skin problems and neurologic disorders.

A dog’s thyroid gland can become less active because it shrinks (for unknown reasons) or because it is attacked by the dog’s own immune system. The thyroid gland regulates the rate of metabolism. If it is underactive, it produces too little thyroid hormone and the dog’s metabolism slows down.

When the metabolic rate slows, virtually every system in the body is affected. Most dogs with low thyroid levels have one or more physical or chemical abnormalities that are typical of the disease:

- Weight gain without an increase in appetite or an increase in amount of feeding
- Lethargy and lack of desire to exercise
- Cold intolerance and/or “heat-seeking” behavior
- Dry hair coat with excessive shedding
- Very thin hair coat, even to the point of near-baldness
- Increased pigmentation in the skin
- Increased susceptibility to skin and ear infections
- Failure to regrow hair after clipping or shaving
- High blood cholesterol level
- Behavior changes
- Neurological changes

Hypothyroidism is diagnosed based on symptoms and blood testing. Thyroid levels below normal range, along with the correct clinical signs, suggest the presence of hypothyroid disease. Response to treatment helps to confirm the diagnosis.

Hypothyroidism is treatable with thyroid hormone replacement pills. This drug must be given for the rest of the dog’s life.

Successful treatment produces visible signs of improvement, including hair regrowth, healthier skin, more energy, and often weight loss. A standard dose of medication is used initially, based on the dog’s weight. After 4-6 weeks of treatment, the dog will have a recheck appointment for the veterinarian to evaluate progress. This appointment should be 3-6 hours after a dose of medication, and the dog should have little or no food that morning. At this time, the blood test is repeated to verify that the thyroid hormone levels have become normal. The veterinarian will call you with the test results and may adjust the medication dosage. Since some dogs’ requirements change over time, re-testing once yearly is recommended.