

Hypothyroidism and Your Dog

What dog owners need to know about the common endocrine disorder hypothyroidism.

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Dogs with unexplained problems such as weight gain, lethargy, or skin changes may have hypothyroidism, a common endocrine disorder in canines. Hypothyroidism occurs when the thyroid gland fails to produce enough of the hormone thyroxine. This disorder must be diagnosed by a veterinarian, who will run blood tests to evaluate the dog's thyroid gland function.

If a diagnosis of hypothyroidism is confirmed, veterinarians often prescribe a daily dose of levothyroxine, a synthetic compound that is the same active ingredient prescribed for people with hypothyroidism. Levothyroxine replaces the thyroid hormone that hypothyroid dogs lack.

In the vast majority of cases, levothyroxine is the only medication needed for the effective management of hypothyroidism. With treatment, the prognosis for dogs with the disease is excellent. Many signs of hypothyroidism will resolve within weeks after starting medication, enabling dogs to lead healthy, comfortable, normal lives.

Dogs with hypothyroidism, however, will require continuous care from a veterinarian. Periodic blood testing is generally advised to ensure that the dose of levothyroxine is optimal. Sometimes a change in the dosage is needed.

Dogs of all breeds can develop hypothyroidism, but some breeds are more likely to get it than others. These breeds include the Afghan Hound, Airedale Terrier, Bulldog, Chinese Shar Pei, Chow Chow, Cocker Spaniel, Dachshund, Doberman Pinscher, Golden Retriever, Great Dane, Boxer, Irish Setter, and Miniature Schnauzer.