Canine Hypothyroidism

Hypothyroidism results from a lack of thyroid hormone production from the thyroid glands located in the neck. Thyroid hormone regulates metabolism and affects many body functions resulting in many common clinical symptoms. The cause of this disease is now considered to be an inherited autoimmune disorder.

Signs

The signs of hypothyroidism are non-specific and diffuse and generally affect middle-aged to older dogs. Lethargy, exercise intolerance, increased body weight and hair coat changes are the more common problems noted by the owner. Chronic skin infections, hair loss and darkening of the skin can occur. Other changes include slowing of the heart rate and reproductive problems such as failure to cycle, infertility, abortion and poor litter survival.

Testing

Diagnosis of this disorder generally involves blood testing and physical findings. A serum thyroid level or a thyroid "panel" is obtained as a common screening test. If the thyroid hormone level is too low and no other physical problems exist, your dog may then be placed on thyroid replacement medication. The disadvantage of the single thyroid level test is that thyroid levels can be artificially low for a variety of reasons including other diseases and normal individual variations due to breed and body size. Interpretation of this test can be difficult in these instances. The more complete thyroid panel is more comprehensive and can be more accurate for most dogs.

Treatment

Treatment of this disorder involves supplementing thyroid hormone (Soloxine) in a pill form once or twice a day. In most cases, you can generally expect improvement in hair coat, skin condition, weight and activity level in about 2 months. Treatment is generally life-long as there is no cure for hypothyroidism.

Monitoring

We recommend rechecking the thyroid level in 6-8 weeks after initiating replacement therapy and then yearly. Blood samples should be checked 4-6 hours after administering a pill. Most dogs do not have any problems with the medications.