HYPERTHYROIDISM IN DOGS

(An underactive thyroid) What is hyperthyroidism?

What is hypothyroidism?

Hypothyroidism in dogs results from a decrease in production of thyroid hormones from the thyroid glands. These hormones regulate many body processes and when in short supply they can cause serious illness. One role of the thyroid hormones is to help control the body's metabolic rate. This means that despite a decreased appetite, dogs will use less energy and therefore gain weight.

What causes hypothyroidism?

This disease is mostly seen in middle aged to older dogs and is generally caused by the dog's own immune system attacking the thyroid gland causing degeneration.

Clinical signs

Hypothyroidism may affect almost any body system and because of this it can cause a myriad of clinical signs including:

- Depression, lethargy,
- Reduced exercise tolerance.
- Low rectal temperature.
- Normal or reduced appetite.
- Weight gain.
- Low resting heart rate.
- Muscle wasting, stiffness, weakness.
- Symmetrical trunk alopecia (loss of hair).
- Poor coat condition.
- Thickened skin.
- Aggression.
- Skin infections.

Diagnosis

Routine bloods are usually taken to help eliminate or diagnosis non-thyroidal illness. It will also be necessary to take thyroid specific blood tests. There are a range of thyroid function tests and it may be necessary to do more than one blood test to definitively diagnose hypothyroidism as the tests can give false negatives/positives leaving inconclusive results and therefore requiring confirmation from a second test.

Treatment

The treatment consists of daily tableting with a synthetic thyroid hormone in order to bring the bodies' blood levels back into the normal range and eliminate any unwanted clinical signs. The tablets can be given once or twice daily depending on the individual.
The patient will be initially started on a standard conservative dose and a blood test taken 4 weeks later in order to test their response. It may take several blood tests and dose changes to reach the required effect but most hypothyroid dogs will stabilise reasonably quickly (1-3 months) and they usually remain stable throughout the treatment.

Monitoring

It will be necessary to take periodic blood tests in order to monitor the disease and make sure the patient is receiving the correct dose as thyroidal illness can be dynamic. The interval will be more regular during the beginning of their treatment but will usually become 6 monthly.

Prognosis

Most dogs being treated for hypothyroidism will lead a normal quality of life and life expectancy.