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Thyroid Disease In Dogs And Cats

Thyroid Disease in dogs and cats is not uncommon. In fact, along with diabetes mellitus it is one of the most commonly seen endocrine disease in veterinary medicine. But canine thyroid disease is very different from feline thyroid disease.

The most common thyroid disease found in dogs is **hypo**thyroidism. As the name states, this is a lack of thyroid hormone present in the body. Thyroid hormone is responsible for a variety of metabolic processes. Dogs can exhibit various signs when they lacking adequate thyroid hormone. The most common sign is a general lack of energy and often substantial weight gain in spite of the dog actually not eating much. The diminished thyroid hormone allows the dog to eat very little but not utilize what they are eating very efficiently. In other words, they aren't "burning off" the calories they consume. Other common signs can be chronic ear or skin infections and a lackluster hair coat.

A simple blood test can detect hypothyroidism in the dog. If the dog is diagnosed with hypothyroidism then treatment involves a simple medication that is usually given twice daily with periodic monitoring of thyroid hormone levels in the blood and adjustments to the medication as needed.

Thyroid cancer is relatively uncommon in dogs. If a neck mass in the thyroid area is palpated by a Veterinarian then thyroid cancer must always be a possibility. If a dog with a suspected thyroid tumor is tested for thyroid hormone levels and the levels are high then that increases the probability that the mass is a cancerous thyroid tumor. Surgery to remove the tumor is then usually performed and the tumor is examined microscopically by a pathologist. If thyroid hormone levels are tested at a later date and the levels are still elevated then it must be considered possible that the tumor has spread to another area and that secondary tumor is producing the excess thyroid hormone. Thyroid tumors in dogs are usually cancerous but can sometimes be benign.

Feline thyroid disease is totally different when compared to canine thyroid disease. Cats overwhelmingly develop **hyper**thyroidism. As the name indicates this is an excess of thyroid hormone. In the case of cats this is almost always due to a thyroid tumor but the tumor is generally benign and rarely cancerous. Signs

of thyroid disease in cats can include a voracious appetite accompanied by unexplained weight loss. The weight loss can be severe. It is not uncommon to be presented with a cat that has lost 2 or 3 pounds in less than a year yet is eating more than they were before the weight loss. This weight loss combined with an increased appetite is a huge red flag for looking closely into the possibility that the cat has hyperthyroidism.

Feline hyperthyroidism is usually caused by a thyroid tumor. Unlike dogs, thyroid tumors in cats are usually benign. Sometimes the tumor can be palpated by a Veterinarian. Treatment for hyperthyroidism in cats involves more options. The most common treatment for hyperthyroidism in cats involves a drug that interferes with iodine incorporation in the body. Since iodine is necessary for thyroid hormone production the drug basically inhibits the body's ability to make the hormone. The medication is given once or twice daily orally and is usually very effective in controlling the excess thyroid hormone levels in the body of the cat. Periodic monitoring of the thyroid levels and needed adjustments of the drug dosage is usually very effective in controlling the disease.

Surgery is also sometimes performed if there is a noted thyroid mass detected in the cat and the thyroid hormone levels are elevated. In some cases surgery can be curative. But even though cats usually have benign thyroid tumors it is not unusual for them to also have thyroid tissue that is not in the usual place thyroid tissue should be. So, surgery can be performed and the cat can still have elevated thyroid hormones afterward due to additional tissue elsewhere.

Another treatment for feline hyperthyroidism involves injecting a radioactive iodine substance into the cat. The radioactive iodine is absorbed by the abnormal thyroid tissue and destroys it. This treatment requires the cat to stay at a special facility that can perform the treatment. The cat remains at the facility until radiation levels are safe. Then, once home, the clients have to continue with some minor contamination protocols for a while.

Most cats and dogs with benign thyroid disease do very well with treatment. In the case of cats, untreated thyroid disease can be deadly. Hypothyroidism in dogs would not usually be fatal but would result in a dog that had a lower quality of life compared to a dog that is treated.