

The Connection Between HEALTH & BEHAVIOR

There is a direct connection between how you feel and how you act. Dogs who don't feel well due to chronic illness, pain or discomfort typically have a lower threshold for aggression. They may withdraw from physical contact or actively attempt to drive away even friendly attempts at interaction by strangers or family.

Simple allergies can cause a dog to be short tempered. Imagine wearing an itchy wool sweater 24 hours a day that you couldn't take off. Imagine living with ears that itch, feet that burn and not being able to find relief. You'd be cranky, too! Physical ailments like hip dysplasia, back problems, or diminished sight or hearing can also have a profound effect on how your dog perceives and responds to the world.



IS IT REALLY A BEHAVIOR PROBLEM?

Before you start with a behavior modification program, visit your veterinarian for a complete veterinary work-up.

THYROID and its effects on AGGRESSIVE or FEARFUL BEHAVIOR

Dogs who were "fine" and then suddenly aren't should be taken to the veterinarian for a complete health exam, including a complete blood panel. Behavioral symptoms often have a physical source.

Studies show a direct correlation between borderline thyroid scores and aberrant behavior, including aggression, shy or fearful behavior and seizure activity. Seizures can range from minor "fly-catching" or light and shadow chasing to more typical seizures.

The key word here is BORDERLINE.

From Tufts University:

"In dogs, as in humans, behavioral signs often precede the more traditional skin, coat and metabolic changes characteristic of the condition". ... "we believe that truly euthyroid dogs in most breeds should have hormonal levels falling in the upper half of previously accepted normal ranges, This is particularly true of dogs under 18 months of age. We feel that the panel gives a clearer picture of overall thyroid function. Indeed of the cases treated so far only about 40% would have been considered hypothyroid on a standard T4 test, the rest would mostly fall in the borderline category. Some cases in which elevated autoantibody levels indicate autoimmune disease would otherwise have been considered thyroid normal at the time of presentation."

"At Tufts we have seriously considered obtaining a thyroid panel on all dogs presented for evaluation, and we feel that it is a very good screen for a condition which may underlie a wide variety of behavioral problems, and one which is relatively easily and cheaply treated. It is our recommendation that hypothyroidism be considered as a rule out for dogs and horses showing inappropriate aggression. It should also be a rule out for dogs which show an inability to learn or concentrate on the owner, or for older dogs which have developed a personality change either rapidly or more gradually. It is probably a good rule out for dogs which exhibit fears or anxieties and possibly for some dogs with compulsive disorders." - L.P. Aronson DVM & N.H. Dodman RVMS

Routine lab testing will be looking for scores outside the "normal" range - however to accurately diagnose borderline scores that may be the source of abnormal behavior, your vet may recommend sending your pet's blood work to a university or lab that specializes in endocrine diagnostics, rather than a local lab, to rule out thyroid as a behavior cause. We encourage you to pursue this additional testing as we have personally counseled several cases where a trip to the vet and a prescription for Soloxine was the whole solution, saving the client weeks and months and money wasted on behavior modification which would have done little good, as the source was medical not behavioral. (Note: Soloxine is the preferred source of hormone replacement in the dog according to Dr. Dave Bruyette, DACVIM since generic products are inconsistent in the formulations and therefore in results.)

Research done at Auburn University indicates that in-house T4 tests are unreliable and inaccurate 52% of the time in dogs. "Having treated lots of animals for hypothyroidism, the most important thing I can recommend is the [full] panel versus the total T4. Every time I think that you can tell something by doing a total T4, I'm mistaken," says Dr. Whitney Pressler, DVM. - Whole Dog Journal article, "Help for Hypothyroidism", June 2005.

We encourage all of our clients to have their veterinarian involved up front in treating any behavioral problem that could possibly have a medical side to it, either as an etiology or solution. It is important to get the big picture and treat the whole animal and not just the behavior.