

The Hidden Signs of Hypothyroidism You Don't Want to Miss

Sadly, by the time classic symptoms appear, 70% of the thyroid gland may be damaged. These less obvious signs may alert you to a problem early enough to seek help. Plus: NEW technology for detecting food sensitivities for dogs plagued with gas, vomiting, and GI upset.

Analysis by [Dr. Karen Shaw Becker](#)

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- In part 1 of this 2-part video series, Dr. Becker talks to Dr. Jean Dodds, founder of Hemopet Advanced Canine Thyroid Testing and Canine Food Sensitivity Testing.

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Today I'm extremely excited to interview, via Skype, Dr. Jean Dodds. Dr. Dodds has graciously agreed to talk with me this morning, at a very early hour for her in California.

Many of you have probably already heard of Dr. Dodds. She lectures worldwide on clinical pathology and hematology, blood banking, immunology, endocrinology, nutrition, and holistic medicine.

In 1986, Dr. Dodds started a nonprofit organization called **Hemopet**, which set the standard for veterinary transfusion medicine. Then in 1991, Dr. Dodds created the **Pet Life-Line**, which is a greyhound rescue adoption organization that physiologically feeds transfusion medicine. The doctor also started Hemolife at the same time. Each of these endeavors has achieved worldwide recognition.

How I Learned About Dr. Dodds

I met Dr. Dodds in 1999 when I began using her lab for thyroid tests for my clinic patients. I switched to Dr. Dodds' lab when I recognized other veterinary labs doing thyroid tests lumped every dog and cat together to develop norms and averages.

For example, 2 year-old male, intact Chihuahua test results were compared to the normal reference values for 12 year-old female, spayed Huskies. And while all dogs are the same species, there are significant metabolic and physiologic differences between those two groups of dogs, as an example.

Dr. Dodds recognizes normal reference values vary depending on several factors specific to the animal's breed, gender, age, health status and other variables. She has developed a massive databank of information which we now use to capture and track test results based on physiology.

I asked Dr. Dodds why it is that she's the only resource worldwide who takes into account dynamic physiologic factors in test results. Dr. Dodds responded that she wonders the same thing herself!

For example, Michigan State University has a larger computer database of test results than she does, and access to the same decades-old information demonstrating that thyroid and other lab parameters vary with the breed, gender, age and so forth of the animal. Dr. Dodds thinks it's pretty odd that only her lab takes all these factors into account in determining normal reference values for lab test results.

There are a lot of reasons I personally prefer Hemolife over other labs. Probably the biggest is that in addition to the more precise parameters she uses to compare test results, Dr. Dodds also personally reviews every blood test that comes through Hemolife and adds her own comments. This is like a little bonus I receive when I send tests to her lab, and I find it extremely helpful.

Are Autoimmune Diseases in Pets on the Rise?

Next I asked Dr. Dodds about the condition known as autoimmune thyroiditis. It feels to me as though this disease is on the rise, but it also could be we're simply diagnosing it more accurately in recent years. Dr. Dodds feels both situations are in play, both in pets and in humans.

Many of you reading this are aware that immune-mediated or autoimmune diseases are on the rise across the globe. Dr. Dodds says this is partly a problem of environmental exposure, but we also have better diagnostic tools available today, such as critical thyroid antibody testing. This tool wasn't available in veterinary medicine 20 years ago.

I recognize this to be true because when I was in college 20 or so years ago, we certainly learned about hypothyroidism, but we heard very little about autoimmune thyroiditis.

Dr. Dodds believes in addition to environmental exposure and improved diagnostics, another factor in the rising rate of autoimmune diseases in dogs is inbreeding and line breeding of purebred and hybrid-breed dogs. This has increased the genetic predisposition of some animals toward immune-mediated disease.

Early, Hidden Signs a Pet Has Hypothyroidism

Something else I learned after vet school when I began my practice is that vet students are taught there's nothing wrong with an animal until there are obvious signs of illness. Signs, for example, like hair loss, lethargy, or a change in mood.

What I found in my practice is an animal can show up in what appears to be vibrant health, but there's underlying metabolic disease (as an example). I asked Dr. Dodds about hidden symptoms in a hypothyroid dog that we should be looking for but do not.

Dr. Dodds points out that less obvious signs of hypothyroidism can be present for up to a year before classical symptoms appear. And unfortunately, it's not until 70% of the thyroid gland is damaged by autoimmune-generated destruction that classical signs present. So an animal doesn't just wake up one morning with hypothyroidism — the disease has progressed to the point where it's obvious.

Early signs are typically behavioral in nature, for example, erratic or unstable temperament, passivity, irritability or aggression. Or the pet doesn't pay attention when you call him. There are a variety of subtle changes taking place the family often doesn't notice because they occur slowly and progressively.

Sometimes it's an infrequent visitor who points out changes in the pet's behavior. Subtle weight gain is another symptom — idiopathic obesity, which is obesity with no apparent cause. The animal isn't eating more or exercising less, yet is gaining weight gradually. Often the skin and hair coat look very healthy, but metabolically a significant amount of damage is occurring.

Link Between Vaccines and Autoimmune Disorders

I asked Dr. Dodds if she sees any link between vaccinations and increasing numbers of autoimmune disorders.

Dr. Dodds says the connection is clear. Vaccines are an environmental trigger of sorts, along with too many drugs in general — flea/tick products, heartworm products, etc.

We're subjecting pets to constant and repeated exposure to chemicals and drugs. Dr. Dodds believes vaccines are not clean, pure products. She says they contain remnants of tissue cultures and other chemicals. Dr. Dodds believes these are toxic tissue cultures being injected into animals. There are a few intranasal vaccines in existence, but most vaccines are injected.

I next asked Dr. Dodds about her involvement as co-creator of the **Rabies Challenge Fund**.

Dr. Dodds explains the Rabies Challenge Fund is a not-for-profit charitable trust. Their work involves concurrent five and seven year trials to determine that rabies vaccines don't need to be given every one, two or three years as currently required by law. These trials have already been validated in France, but U.S. regulations are different, so the French data can't be validated here.

The Rabies Challenge Fund is halfway through year four of the concurrent trials. So within the next two years, Dr. Dodds hopes to have a trial that will not only license a five-year vaccine for dogs, but will also point to exactly what antibody level in the blood is truly protective against rabies for dogs. At the moment, we only know this information for humans, and extrapolate for animals.

I am personally very excited about this research. It will ultimately allow us to provide a rabies vaccine that protects pets against the disease without making them toxic through repeated, unnecessary vaccinations. You can learn more about this important research at **rabieschallengefund.org**.

Dr. Dodds' Hemolife Lab Testing Service

I next asked Dr. Dodds about Hemolife's reputation for accuracy, reliability, and a patented method for interpreting test results.

Dr. Dodds points out that her 25 year database is indeed patented. It allows her to factor in the age, breed and activity level of animals as part of the results measurement — for example separating 'couch potato' dogs from Iditarod racers. Obviously, those variables in activity level point to different metabolic needs.

Dr. Dodds has 48 years of background in clinical pathology as well as veterinary medicine, and as a result she is extremely concerned with reliability, reproducibility and rigid standards for running assays in her lab. Hemolife's technology since 2009 runs only environmentally safe, non radio-isotopic assays for thyroid function in dogs.

Dr. Dodds recommends annual thyroid testing for dogs that are genetically predisposed to hypothyroidism. For those of you interested in having your dog's test results sent to Hemolife for analysis, you can ask your veterinarian to send them there.

You can visit the [**Hemolife webpage**](#), read about how to send in samples and download the appropriate form to take with you to your vet. Your vet can send the blood test to Hemolife and they'll return the results to both your vet and you. As guardian of your pet, both Dr. Dodds and I believe you should have a copy of all lab test results. You may need them while traveling, in the case of an emergency, or if you move or have some other reason to change veterinarians.

Saliva Testing

I asked Dr. Dodds, who is always involved in new and exciting projects, what's currently in the works at Hemopet. Dr. Dodds says she recently got a new patented technology called NutraScan. It's a method for scanning saliva from pets (dogs only for right now) to look for antibodies in the GI tract against particular foods. In other words, it's a method of detecting food sensitivities and intolerances in canines.

Dr. Dodds points out that this testing is not synonymous with food allergy tests. We use the term 'food allergy' all the time, but the fact is, true allergies to food are extremely rare.

What the NutraScan technology looks at is a dog's sensitivity to or intolerance of a particular food. This is a great tool to have for dogs exhibiting classical signs of sensitivity such as a rumbling tummy, gas, some diarrhea and/or constipation, or perhaps vomiting.

These symptoms don't occur immediately upon eating an offending food. They typically occur from two to 72 hours later. Often, it's difficult to associate a dog's digestive issues with something she ate, because the offending food could've been ingested days ago.
