Swallowing & Hypothyroidism
Polyneuropathy and central nervous dysfunction have been reported in dogs that are hypothyroid. The pathogenesis is not known—metabolic abnormalities in the axonal transport and/or Schwann cell dysfunction may account for some neuronal damage. In this case, an 8-year-old male boxer presented with a 3-day history of compulsive, ineffective drinking; dysphagia; regurgitation; and nasal reflux while drinking. The dog had normal spinal reflexes with conscious proprioceptive deficits in both hindlimbs. Survey radiographs of the pharyngeal area and thorax were normal. Fluoroscopy was used to evaluate swallowing function. The dog had normal prehension and bolus formation, but the esophageal sphincter did not relax during the examination. Only a small amount of barium passed to the esophagus and stomach during the test. The dog had low thyroxine levels and high thyroid-stimulating hormone levels. He was treated with L-thyroxine every 12 hours and had recovered fully 1 month after therapy was started. Differential diagnoses for dogs with cricopharyngeal achalasia should include hypothyroidism.

COMMENTARY: Cricopharyngeal achalasia is a relatively rare diagnosis requiring fluoroscopic or cinefluoroscopic evaluation. If the disease is suspected, especially in middle-aged or older dogs, thyroid testing should be done to rule out hypothyroidism.—Patricia Thomblison, DVM, MS