

FELINE HYPERTHYROIDISM

Feline hyperthyroidism is a common endocrine disorder. The disease is caused by an increase in thyroid hormones (called T3 and T4) produced by an enlarged thyroid gland, resulting in an increased metabolic rate.

With feline hyperthyroidism, the thyroid gland may enlarge and become more active in a benign manner, or it may develop from a malignant tumor. Most cases of hyperthyroidism fall into the benign category. Hyperthyroidism is usually seen in older cats, typically 8 years of age or greater.

Signs of excessive thyroid production include weight loss despite a ravenous appetite, frequent bowel movements, vomiting, diarrhea, increased thirst and urination, restlessness, frequent crying or vocalization, neglect of normal grooming habits, and rapid heartbeat. These symptoms can be variable and in some instances, exact opposite symptoms may be seen. The effects of hyperthyroidism on the heart may be severe and can result in congestive heart failure.

Currently, there are two recommended means of treating the benign version of the disease.

Medication

The medication Tapazole (also known as Methimazole) can be used to treat hyperthyroidism. This treatment is done in an effort to **control** the disease process. The medication must be given for the rest of the cat's life, and requires periodic blood tests and recheck examinations.

An initial dosage regimen is started, and the thyroid levels are rechecked in 3–4 weeks. If the thyroid levels are normal, the dosage is kept the same and the cat is rechecked in 3 months, and then every 6 months thereafter. If at any time the thyroid levels are too high or too low, the dosage is adjusted and the cat is rechecked in 3–4 weeks. Again, this treatment course must be continued lifelong.

Radioactive Iodine Treatment

Radioactive iodine (I-131) is another option for treating hyperthyroidism. This treatment is done in an effort to **cure** the disease process, but may cause serious side effects. The treatment typically requires a cat to be hospitalized for 1 to 2 weeks, and requires referral to another facility.

Treatment of Malignant Disease

In the event of a malignant (cancerous) thyroid diagnosis, surgery and/or radiation therapy may be needed.

Choosing the Best Option for Your Cat

Which treatment is best for your cat depends on a combination of factors, including the cat's age, previously existing medical conditions, and your financial resources. We'll discuss all options with you, and help you make the best choice for your cat.



For additional information about feline hyperthyroidism, please speak with one of our doctors.