



Hyperthyroidism

Hyperthyroidism is one of the most common endocrine disorders that affect cats. The thyroid hormone's main function is to set the cat's metabolic rate at the right pace. Too much hormone causes an overactive metabolism and too little causes a sluggish metabolism.

Cats usually develop hyperthyroidism through the development of an adenoma (tumor) in the thyroid gland. This benign tumor is primarily made up of thyroid cells and this increase in cells creates an increase in the secretion of thyroid hormone. Hyperthyroidism usually occurs in adult cats (5 years and older) with most cats developing symptoms in their early teens. The symptoms for this disease are wide and variable with the most common client concerns being weight loss, increased activity, increased vocalization, increased food and water consumption and vomiting. An increased heart rate or a heart murmur are also common discoveries on physical examination. Hyperthyroidism sets your cat's "idle system" on high. This internal stress can cause damage to a variety of body systems and organs such as the kidneys and heart. Without treatment, these systems become overstressed and can begin to fail.

Hyperthyroidism is diagnosed by measuring the level of thyroid hormone in the blood.

There are currently four common ways to treat hyperthyroidism in cats; we will discuss the best option for your pet.

- **Medication:** The use of oral antithyroid medication (methimazole) is still a very popular treatment choice. It is given in a pill form, usually twice daily for the life of the cat. It works by blocking the secretion of thyroid hormone in the gland. This treatment only manages the diseases; it does not cure it.
- **Diet:** By feeding only a specially formulated diet with a low iodine content, the amount of thyroid hormone produced can often be controlled. This may not work in all cases and it is very important that the cat not get ANY extra food or treats.
- **Surgery:** Surgery involves the removal of the affected thyroid gland, which can be an effective cure for this disease. It may eliminate the need for daily administration of medications.
- **Radioactive Iodine:** The basic principle behind treatment with radioiodine is that thyroid cells do not differentiate between stable and radioactive iodine. After injection, radioiodine is concentrated by the thyroid gland where it irradiates and destroys the cancerous cells. The healthy tissue is not damaged by this treatment.

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