

Feline Hyperthyroidism

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What Is It?

Feline hyperthyroidism is a common endocrine disorder in older cats. Approximately 10% of older cats will develop this condition at some point in their lifetime. Cats have 2 thyroid glands situated on either side of their neck and their role is to control the body's metabolism. When these glands start to become overactive, usually from a benign tumor, the body's metabolism rate goes into overdrive, causing stress to the heart, digestive tract, and other organ systems. Unfortunately, even with extensive research going into the problem, we don't know what causes the thyroid to go rogue in some older cats, so prevention is difficult. Luckily, there are a wonderful variety of treatments available to help these kitties enjoy their golden years.

What Does Hyperthyroidism Look Like?

Signs of hyperthyroidism can be variable, but the most common problems are weight and muscle loss despite a great appetite, vomiting, diarrhea, accidents outside the box, increased restlessness, increased vocalization, and a poor hair coat.

If the problem isn't addressed at this point, more serious consequences can develop, such as high blood pressure, heart disease, and trouble breathing.

How Is It Diagnosed?

We do recommend screening laboratory tests in older cats and dogs in order to try to find problems and intervene before they get out of control. Cats are masters of disguise and like hiding their problems until they become very obvious.

A thyroid test should be part of every older cat's yearly bloodwork. We diagnose an overactive thyroid with a combination of physical exam findings and blood test results.

Treatment Options

Once your cat is diagnosed with an overactive thyroid, it is important to rule out other co-existing problems such as kidney disease, high blood pressure, etc. We will discuss various treatment options, and will recommend the ones we believe will be the best for you and your specific cat.

- **Radio-iodine Therapy**-This is the coolest, but most expensive treatment option. There are veterinary centers that are licensed to administer your cat an intravenous injection of radioactive iodine. The iodine is taken up by the overactive thyroid tissue and is destroyed. This is typically a one-time treatment with an approximately 99% success rate. Your cat will need to stay at the center until it is no longer radio-active, which is typically about 3 days.
- **Medical Therapy**-Twice daily pills of methimazole is the most common treatment method that most people choose. This drug blocks excess thyroid hormone in the bloodstream. Unlike the radioactive iodine therapy mentioned above, the pills do not cure the disease, so they must be

given for life. Most cats tolerate the medication well with few side effects. Repeat blood testing will need to be done to ensure proper dosing. For cats that don't tolerate pilling or that have side-effects, there is a customized ear gel that can work for many cats.

- **Nutritional Therapy**-There is at least one prescription diet available for cats with mild or early thyroid disease. This diet is made with ZERO iodine. The thyroid gland needs iodine to function, so depriving the body of iodine naturally causes the thyroid to not be so over-zealous. This will not work in multi-cat households where the cats all share food, and it will typically not work in advanced cases.

Will My Cat Be Ok?

Typically, yes! Especially if the disease is detected early and there is no permanent organ damage. It will take some work, regular check-ups and adjustments, but your kitty should hopefully be just fine with proper care!