



HYPERTHYROIDISM



If you have any further queries regarding the welfare of your pet, please do not hesitate to ask a member of staff

We are happy to assist!



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What is hyperthyroidism?

Hyperthyroidism is the most common endocrine (hormonal) disorder of cats. It is rarely seen in cats under eight years of age and there is no sex or breed predisposition. It is caused by an overactive thyroid gland. This gland produces thyroid hormone which helps to regulate your cat's metabolism, or rate of bodily activity. When the thyroid gland produces too much hormone, your cat's internal motor effectively goes into overdrive. Untreated this would eventually be fatal but the condition can now be successfully treated.

What are the clinical signs of hyperthyroidism?

Cats may present with a combination of the following clinical signs which tend to develop gradually:

1. weight loss
2. increased appetite
3. increased activity and restlessness
4. increased heart rate
5. increased frequency of defecation,
6. increased thirst and urination
7. occasional vomiting
8. panting
9. matted, greasy and unkempt coat

However, one in ten cases often present with the opposite of the signs expected, such as depression, loss of appetite and physical weakness.



Cat with hyperthyroidism exhibiting weight loss and unkempt coat

How is hyperthyroidism diagnosed?

In hyperthyroidism a nodule is usually palpable in one or both of the thyroid lobes. As the enlarged lobe may be freely movable and can slide along and behind the trachea, it may be difficult to detect requiring careful palpation. In the normal cat, the thyroid lobes are either not palpable or small and symmetrical.

Once hyperthyroidism is suspected, the diagnosis is confirmed by detecting elevated serum thyroid hormone levels. Other tests may also show abnormal results such as elevation of the liver enzymes, or changes on an electrocardiograph (ECG).

How can hyperthyroidism be treated?

There are three therapeutic options for the treatment of hyperthyroidism. Which treatment option is most suitable for your cat depends on a number of factors and your vet will discuss this with you.

1. Anti-thyroid drug therapy

Anti-thyroid drugs are readily available and economical. They do not destroy thyroid gland, but act by interfering with production and secretion of thyroid hormone. Their use does not result in a cure, but rather controls the condition. Thiamazole (Felimazole) is commonly used, initially given twice daily, then reducing to a maintenance dose once the thyroid hormone levels have returned to normal. Treatment must continue for the rest of your cat's life and in some cats there are side effects of the drug ranging from fatigue to anaemia. Health checks and blood tests are required every 3 months to monitor your cat.

2. Surgical thyroidectomy

Surgical thyroidectomy (removal of the thyroid glands) has the immediate advantage over drug therapy in that it provides a cure. However anaesthesia can be problematic in hyperthyroid patients both as a direct result of the condition and also because a number of patients have other concurrent diseases e.g. chronic renal failure. There are several possible side effects to this procedure, including nerve damage, or damage to the parathyroid glands (responsible for controlling the level of calcium in the blood).

3. ¹³¹I (radioactive iodine) therapy

An injection of radioactive iodine (¹³¹I) selectively destroys the abnormal thyroid tissue, while leaving normal cells unaffected.

The primary advantages of ¹³¹I treatment are that it is curative (95% only require one injection), has no serious side-effects, does not require an anaesthetic or sedation, is associated with a low recurrence of hyperthyroidism and the location of the tumour is unimportant. Hospitalisation for between 1 and 2 weeks following treatment is necessary to allow adequate decay of the ¹³¹I. This treatment is only available at a few sites in the UK and so not commonly used.

