

HYPERTHYROID DISEASE IN CATS PET CARE SHEET

The thyroid glands are located on either side of the neck, next to the animal's trachea (windpipe) and normally produce carefully controlled amounts of thyroid hormones, thyroxine and T4, which are responsible for regulating the body's metabolic rate. Hyperthyroidism is a very common disorder caused by over production of thyroid hormones. Hyperthyroidism is most often found in cats over 10 years of age and is caused by a tumour in the thyroid gland. Fortunately, 97% of these often tiny tumours are benign.

The thyroid hormones are responsible for the body's basic rate of metabolism, this means that they control the rate at which the body works. For example, the amount of thyroid hormone in the blood determines how fast the body's cells burn energy, the heart beat rate, how fast the gut works and the speed at which the skin and hair grow

The onset of hyperthyroidism symptoms is often subtle and may mimic other age related diseases. When too much thyroid hormone is being produced, the body will need extra fuel for its increased work rate and your cat will start to eat a lot more, will begin to cry for food all the time, whilst not putting on any weight. Your cat will also drink more for the same reason and will thus need to urinate more often. You may also notice that your cat's coat becomes dull and lifeless and bald patches may even start to appear. Due to increased gut activity, your pet may develop vomiting and/or diarrhoea. Hyperthyroid cats are often restless and irritable, have a high heart rate and your vet may hear a heart murmur during examination. If your cat is suspected of suffering from this condition, a blood sample should be taken to measure the thyroid levels and confirm the diagnosis before treatment is commenced. Often concurrent diseases like heart, liver or kidney disease are present. Hyperthyroidism, if left untreated, can lead to heart failure, kidney damage and death.

There are four treatment options for Feline Hyperthyroidism:

- 1) Medical management: Anti-thyroid tablets eg Felimazole or Vidalta reduce the production of thyroid hormones and often control the disease successfully. They do not cure Hyperthyroidism, so lifelong therapy is needed. Initially blood samples will be necessary every 3 weeks until the cat is stabilised at the correct dose for a normal level of thyroid hormone in the blood. Then blood samples would be taken at regular 6 monthly intervals. There is also a medicated 'gel' which is applied to the ear and used as an alternative to tablets.
- 2) Surgical Thyroidectomy: Surgical removal of the affected thyroid tissue can produce a permanent cure. Occasionally, even after successful surgery, signs of hyperthyroidism develop as previously unaffected thyroid tissue becomes diseased. To minimize surgical risks, cats are stabilised on medical therapy prior to surgery.
- 3) Nuclear Medicine and Radioactive Iodine: Destruction of diseased thyroid tissue with radioactive iodine is possible in some referral centres and comprises about 3 weeks of hospitalized treatment.
- 4) Prescription Diet A special diet very low in iodine can alleviate the symptoms of hyperthyroidism.

If you have any questions about hyperthyroidism or the tablets you have been given, please do not hesitate to contact us.

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