



**Good Friends
Animal
Hospital**

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Hyperthyroidism in Cats

Hyperthyroidism, an overproduction of thyroid hormone, is a relatively common disease in older cats (over 8 years of age). In almost all cats, it is caused by a benign tumor-like growth of the thyroid gland. The thyroid gland is located in the neck under the skin. Clinical signs of hyperthyroidism include weight loss, voracious appetite, poor hair coat, hyperactivity, vomiting, and diarrhea. A diagnosis of hyperthyroidism is confirmed by a blood test that determines the cat's blood thyroid hormone concentration. Additional blood tests should be performed to screen for other health problems that might be present in older cats and might influence choice of treatment and prognosis. Hyperthyroidism is a progressive disease. Signs, if untreated, will continue to worsen until the cat dies. The treatment options explained here have different advantages and disadvantages.

Treatment Options

Medication - The anti-thyroid drug, methimazole (brand name, Tapazole), can be used to control the signs of hyperthyroidism. It works by blocking the production of thyroid hormone. Methimazole does not destroy the tumor, and therefore it does not cure the disease; but it can effectively control the signs of hyperthyroidism when administered according to your veterinarian's directions. Methimazole must be given every day (initially, twice a day).

About 20% of cats treated with methimazole have one or more minor side effects, including loss of appetite, vomiting, and lethargy. In most cats, these side effects are temporary and treatment can be continued. Rarely (5%), more serious side effects develop, such as a predisposition for bleeding and infection. For this reason, during the first three months of treatment, blood tests are required every 2-3 weeks to look for potentially serious blood disorders. During this time, we also fine-tune your cat's dosage of methimazole by monitoring the blood thyroid concentration. Generally, we have had success treating hyperthyroid cats with methimazole; many cats have been well managed with this drug for 2 years or more.

Radioactive Iodine - Hyperthyroidism can be cured by an injection of radioactive iodine (available at the University of Illinois and other treatment centers), which irradiates and destroys the thyroid tumor. Dietary iodine, an essential element, is taken up by normal (and hyperactive) thyroid glands to be used for the synthesis of thyroid hormone. The basis for treatment of hyperthyroidism with radioiodine is that thyroid cells do not differentiate between normal dietary iodine and iodine made radioactive. Therefore, the radioactive iodine given by injection is taken up largely by the tumor where it is localized and where it kills tumor cells while generally sparing normal cells. With this therapy, subsequent development of hypothyroidism (under production of thyroid hormone) is rarely a problem.

People with hyperthyroidism who are treated with radioactive iodine are not usually hospitalized. Unfortunately, we can't simply tell our cats not to be around children or to flush the toilet twice after urinating (most of the radioactivity is excreted from the body in the urine). Your cat must be hospitalized for 7 to 14 days until radioactivity levels have decreased sufficiently. Most cats handle the stress of boarding well. This therapy offers distinct advantages: anesthesia is not required, the disease is cured, and lifelong medication is usually not necessary; however, the cost is generally higher than with other forms of treatment.

Surgery – Surgery to remove the thyroid glands was used in the past, but has fallen out of favor due to the availability of radiation treatment.

Adapted from *Hyperthyroidism in Cats*, the Animal Medical Center, 510 East 62nd Street, NY 10021-8285, (212) 838-8100. The information was received from Daniels Pharmaceutical.