

## Hyperthyroidism in Cats

### What is hyperthyroidism?

Hyperthyroidism is a disease caused by the overproduction of hormone by the thyroid glands. It is a common condition of elderly cats and affects all breeds and both sexes equally. The hormones are important for growth and assist in the metabolism of fat, protein and carbohydrate. Unlike dogs, the thyroid enlargement in cats is normally due to a non-cancerous tumour.

### What signs may my pet show?

- Continuously hungry/searching for food
- Weight loss
- Vomiting
- Restlessness/hyperactivity/irritability
- Drinking and urinating more
- Increase in heart rate and murmurs
- Increase in blood pressure
- Poor coat condition

There is also an atypical form where cats show lethargy, inappetence and weakness

### What will my vet do?

The vet will perform a full clinical examination and take a history to help to differentiate hyperthyroidism from other diseases. A blood test is vital to look at the thyroid hormone level and also to look at the function of other organs in the body. A urine sample and blood pressure measurement may also be taken.

### What are the treatment options?

Hyperthyroidism is readily treatable. There are four main treatment options: lifelong medication, diet, radioactive iodine therapy or surgery. All patients are normally initially stabilised on medication before the other options are considered.

**Medication:** Oral tableting is lifelong medication and is normally given once or twice a day. The drug limits the amount of hormone produced by the thyroid gland. With this treatment, regular blood tests are very important to monitor side effects of the medication and also to make sure that the thyroid hormone levels are being kept under control.

**Curative:** No – daily medication needed

**Side effects:** +++

**Disadvantages:** Daily tableting. Regular check-ups and blood samples are required

**Surgery:** Involves the removal of the enlarged gland and is likely to give a long term cure. Sometimes a second surgery to remove the other gland is needed later on in life. It is not normally advised that both glands are removed together as this can cause complications such as hypocalcaemia.

**Life expectancy has been shown to be better with this treatment than medication.**

**Curative:** Yes

**Side effects:** ++

**Disadvantages:** General anaesthetic  
Risk of complications

### Radioactive iodine:

Done by referral veterinary hospitals. It avoids the risks of surgery and works by selectively destroying the excess thyroid tissue and therefore reducing hormone levels. It involves a long stay in hospital for your pet, but normally gives a long term cure with a good life expectancy similar to that of surgery.

**Curative:** Yes

**Side effects:** +

**Disadvantages:**

Long stay in hospital, can be expensive

**Diet:** Hills Y/D<sup>®</sup> is a diet developed to limit your cat's iodine intake. Iodine is important for thyroid hormone function. The diet is also formulated to support the heart and kidneys. If this method is chosen, your cat must not eat anything but this diet. Therefore, this is only suitable for indoor cats.

**Curative:** No - lifelong diet

**Side effects:** +

**Disadvantages:** Indoor cats only, not ideal for fussy cats

### Why should we treat hyperthyroidism?

Hyperthyroidism is a serious condition that causes significant health problems for your cat such as kidney disease, high blood pressure and heart murmurs, which in combination with the increase in metabolic rate puts extra strain on the body and can lead to a premature death. Once treated most cats have a very happy and healthy life.