



Hyperthyroidism in Cats

Feline hyperthyroidism is a metabolic disorder resulting from excessive circulating thyroid hormone. The excess thyroid hormone is released from an abnormally functioning thyroid gland. The underlying cause in over 98% of cats is a benign adenoma (polyp) of the thyroid gland. In some cases a goitre can be felt at the base of the cat's throat.

Hyperthyroidism is most commonly seen in middle-aged to older cats. The excess thyroid hormones act to increase the metabolic rate, which results in weight loss and a ravenous appetite. The cat may be hyperactive and show behavioural changes. Some cats may also suffer from intermittent vomiting and diarrhoea. Coat condition often becomes dull, greasy and matted.

The increased rate of metabolism can also have an effect on other organs in the body. As metabolic rate increases, heart rate and blood pressure increase also. This increased blood pressure increases blood flow through many internal organs, especially the kidneys. In some cases this increased blood pressure can mask an underlying kidney disease - once the thyroid hormones and blood pressure return to normal these kidney problems can become evident and have to be treated separately.

The increased heart rate means that the heart muscle works harder than normal, causing the walls to become thicker than normal (hypertrophic). In many cases once thyroid levels are corrected, the heart thickness returns to normal as rate reduces. However in some cats the changes are irreversible resulting in heart failure, which may need separate treatment.

Diagnosis

Diagnosis is made using a blood test to check thyroid levels, and we often check other blood parameters at the same time to see if any secondary changes have occurred.

Once treatment is started, periodic tests of thyroid levels may be required to ensure medication is being given at the most effective dose.

Treatment

Most cases can be successfully managed by one of several medical treatments. Treatment is lifelong but reasonably inexpensive.

- **Vidalta** - is a once daily tablet which reduces thyroid levels. The downside is this tablet must be given whole.
- **Felimazole** - are tablets to reduce thyroid levels, and can be crushed in to food. However twice daily dosing is required.
- **Hills Y/D Food** - this is a specialist diet that is fed instead of your cat's normal food. It is not as potent a treatment as the tablets, and may not be suitable for all cases, although is much more convenient for difficult to pill cats.



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In cases where medical treatment is ineffective or absolutely impossible, then surgical removal of the thyroid gland can be attempted. However, this is not without its risks or complications and only considered as a final resort.

Radioactive iodine therapy has also been proven to be successful, however it is only performed at a limited number of institutions in the UK, and long quarantine periods where the cat is radioactive as required.

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