

Hyperthyroidism

Hyperthyroidism is caused by overactivity of the thyroid glands. The thyroid glands normally secrete a regulated amount of hormones that control metabolism. Oversecretion of thyroid hormones leads to a high metabolic state that manifests as weight loss, increased activity level, increased appetite and thirst, and a greasy haircoat. Hyperthyroidism is almost exclusively seen in cats. Most cases of hyperthyroidism are not cancerous, but a small percentage of cats do have cancerous tumors as the underlying cause.

***Diagnosis***

Diagnosis of hyperthyroidism is done by a blood test. Most hyperthyroid cats will have a very high level of thyroid hormone. Occasionally they will appear normal, and additional testing must be done to verify the diagnosis. We will often recommend other screening bloodwork to check for kidney disease, etc. Left untreated, hyperthyroidism can cause many other medical problems including heart disease.

***Treatment & Monitoring***

Untreated hyperthyroidism will gradually get worse over time. The rate of progression differs with every patient and depends on the cause. We almost always recommend treatment, and treatment will need to be continued for life.

There are four possible ways of treating hyperthyroidism. The first is a prescription food, Hill’s y/d, that has a limited amount of iodine in it. Since thyroid hormone contains iodine, controlling the cat’s intake can help to control the amount of hormone that is made. The food may not be enough to completely control the disease, but it will at least help to keep the level of medication needed as low as possible.

The most common method of treatment is a daily medication called methimazole. There is not a specific dose of methimazole that works for every patient, so we will start your cat at a low dose and do periodic rechecks and dose changes as needed to find your pet’s optimal dose. This will likely involve blood testing at the clinic every 3-4 weeks until it is managed, then rechecking every few months, as needs can change over time.

The other possible treatments for hyperthyroidism are surgical removal of the thyroid gland and radioactive iodine treatment. These both require referral to Iowa State University or another specialty clinic. Surgery is typically not recommended, because the success rate is not extremely high. It is difficult for surgeons to remove all of the thyroid tissue, and it is possible for cats to develop thyroid tissue in abnormal places that can continue to produce hormone. Radioactive iodine treatment can be very expensive and requires very careful handling of the patient, urine, and stools for several weeks afterward, but is typically very successful.

If you have any questions or concerns at any point, please contact us at 319-837-6511.