

FELINE HYPERTHYROIDISM

Hyperthyroidism occurs in middle age to older cats, but it is a common disease of older cats. Hyperthyroidism results from the overproduction of thyroid hormone from the thyroid gland. This causes an increase in the metabolic rate which in turn causes weight loss, increased appetite, and increased drinking and urination. Other signs that cats can have include periodic vomiting or diarrhea and a dull, unkempt haircoat. Cats with hyperthyroidism can exhibit hypertension and heart disease. It can also mask kidney disease, by increasing the blood flow through the kidneys.

Hyperthyroidism can be diagnosed with a simple blood test to check the thyroid hormone levels in the blood. Sometimes an enlarged thyroid gland can be palpated in the neck.

There are three choices for treatment of hyperthyroidism. Methimazole or tapazole is an oral medication that prevents the overproduction of thyroid hormone, but does not destroy thyroid tissue. It must be given twice a day for the cat's lifetime. Periodic blood tests are done to keep the dosage regulated.

Surgical removal of the enlarged thyroid gland is another treatment option. There are many potential side effects that can occur with the surgery. Recurrence is a possibility.

A very effective treatment option is radioactive iodine therapy. This destroys all abnormal thyroid tissue with one injection. It requires about one week of hospitalization in a veterinary hospital licensed to administer radiation therapy. This is the most curative form of treatment. Before treatment, it is necessary to check a chemistry panel, complete blood count, urinalysis, thyroid level, and a chest x-ray.

With periodic, routine bloodwork and check ups, many cats can live long, happy lives with this disease. A diet was released by Hill's Prescription Diets in August of 2011 called Y/D for hyperthyroidism. Hopefully this will be beneficial in the treatment of this disease.