

## **HYPERTHYROIDISM**

Hyperthyroidism (overactive thyroid glands) is a fairly common disorder of middle aged and senior cats. It is caused by an increase in production of thyroid hormones. Clinical signs associated with hyperthyroidism can be quite dramatic and cats can become seriously ill with this condition. However, in most cases hyperthyroidism is treatable and most cats will make a complete recovery.

Thyroid hormones have an important role in controlling the body's metabolic rate. So cats with overactive thyroids tend to burn energy very rapidly and typically suffer weight loss despite having an increased appetite and eating more. This does not necessarily mean that the cat itself will act hyper, but rather the cat's metabolism will be faster. In many cases, the overproduction of thyroid hormones is caused by a change in the thyroid gland. Although the exact reason for this change is unknown, the change involves an enlargement of the tissue to one or both glands. Cats usually respond extremely well to treatment, and with early detection and appropriate treatment, prognosis is generally very good. A cancerous tumour can also be an underlying cause of some cases of hyperthyroidism but fortunately this is rare.

**CLINICAL SIGNS** - The 'classic' signs of hyperthyroidism are weight loss, increased appetite, increased thirst, increased irritability, a rapid heart rate and an unkempt coat. Mild to moderate diarrhea and/or vomiting is also quite common. Some affected cats will be noticeably intolerant of heat and seek out cooler places to sit.

**SECONDARY PROBLEMS** - Thyroid hormones stimulate a faster heart rate and a stronger contraction of the heart muscle. Over time, with hyperthyroidism, the heart muscle enlarges and thickens. If left untreated and unmanaged, these changes will eventually compromise the normal function of the heart and can even result in heart failure. However, once the underlying hyperthyroidism has been controlled, the cardiac changes will often improve, or may even resolve completely.

Hypertension (high blood pressure) is another potential complication of hyperthyroidism. This can cause additional damage to several organs including the eyes, kidneys, heart and brain. If hypertension is diagnosed along with hyperthyroidism, drugs will be needed to control the blood pressure to reduce the risk of damaging other organs.

**DIAGNOSIS** - A thorough physical examination of your cat by a veterinarian, as well as the corresponding blood work will confirm whether hyperthyroidism is present in your cat or not. The additional bloodwork profile will also help determine whether any other organs are affected as well.

### **TREATMENTS**

- ❖ Tablets can be administered once or twice daily to maintain the thyroid hormone at a normal range. This is not curative however and the cat will require this medication for the rest of its life.
- ❖ Surgical removal of the affected thyroid tissue is another successful option. This can be a permanent solution and curative but occasionally signs of hyperthyroidism develop again at a later time if previously unaffected thyroid tissue becomes diseased.
- ❖ Radioactive iodine therapy is the third alternative treatment for hyperthyroidism. Radioactive iodine is administered as a single injection given under the skin – the iodine is then taken up by the active (abnormal) thyroid tissue, but not by any other body tissues, resulting in a selective local accumulation of radioactive material in the abnormal tissues. The radiation destroys the affected abnormal thyroid tissue, but does not damage the surrounding tissues or the parathyroid glands.

Reference <http://fabcats.org/owners/hyperthyroidism/info.html>