

Heathcote Veterinary Clinic

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Hospital Hours
Monday to Friday 9.00am – 7.00pm
Saturday from 9.00am
Sunday 9.00am – 12.00pm

Feline Hyperthyroidism

What is hyperthyroidism?

The thyroid glands are located in the neck and play a very important role in regulating the body's rate of metabolism. Hyperthyroidism is a disorder characterized by the overproduction of thyroid hormones and a subsequent increase in the metabolic rate. Although this condition may cause the glands to enlarge, 97% of cases are benign. The typical age at which a cat is first diagnosed is about 10-12 years of age.

What are the clinical signs?

- **rapid or gradual weight loss despite an increased appetite is the most common clinical sign**
- vomiting & diarrhea
- hair loss
- increased activity and restlessness
- increased thirst and urination
- panting, heat and stress intolerance
- occasionally depression or weakness
- a thyroid mass may be palpable in the neck region

Two secondary complications of this disease can be significant, hypertension (high blood pressure) and heart disease. In some cats, the blood pressure can become so high that retinal hemorrhage or detachment will occur and result in blindness. However, both of these problems are reversible with appropriate treatment of the disease.

How is it diagnosed?

The first step is to determine the blood level the thyroid hormone thyroxine or T4. Most of the time, the T4 level is high. Sometimes, a cat will have T4 levels that are not elevated and a second test, called a T3 Suppression Test, is performed. If this is not diagnostic, a thyroid scan can be performed at a veterinary referral center or the T4 can be measured again in a few weeks.

What are my options for treatment?

Feline hyperthyroidism is treated by one of three methods:

1. Daily medication administration (methimazole) is the most common means.
2. Surgical removal of the diseased thyroid gland may be performed, but sometimes has complications. The parathyroid glands may become damaged during surgery, thus requiring the patient to have calcium supplementation for the rest of its life.
3. Radioactive iodine treatment is the preferred method of treatment for feline hyperthyroidism.

What is the prognosis?

The outcomes following radiation therapy are usually excellent and most cats have a very good chance of returning to a normal state of health. Lifelong daily medication also has a good prognosis provided the animals dose is checked regularly with blood tests every 6 months.

Can hyperthyroidism be prevented?

There are currently no preventive measures for feline hyperthyroidism. However, all middle-aged and geriatric cats should receive a complete physical examination by a veterinarian every six to 12 months. This ensures we catch any problems with your cat at an early stage.