

Hyperthyroidism

Hyperthyroidism is a disease caused by an overactive thyroid gland. Too much thyroid hormone increases your cat's metabolism. Untreated this would eventually be fatal but the condition can now be successfully treated.

Symptoms

- Increase in appetite
- Weight loss
- Coat may become rough and unkempt
- Restlessness and aggression
- Body tremors
- Increased drinking and urinating
- Vomiting and diarrhoea
- Some cases may be seen with depression, loss of appetite and physical weakness.

Diagnosis

- Lumpy or enlarged thyroid gland
- Blood tests are usually taken to rule out other diseases of the liver or kidneys
- An abnormally fast or irregular heart beat is often a feature
- Early diagnosis and treatment is important to prevent and even reverse damage to the heart and kidneys.

Treatments

Medication - given one to two times a day.

Advantages

- Simple and does not require an anaesthetic.
- Suitable for cats with severe kidney disease which might be made worse by the other types of treatment.

Disadvantages

- Does not tackle the underlying problem and so treatment must continue throughout your cats life.
- Difficulties in getting your cat to swallow tablets.
- You must remember to give the tablets every day.
- In some cats there are side effects of the drug ranging from fatigue to anaemia.
- In the early stages your cat must be carefully monitored to make sure that the dose is right.

Surgical - The abnormal gland can be surgically removed.

Advantages

- Treatment should permanently cure the disease so no need for further medication.

Disadvantages

- Needs a general anaesthetic which is always a slight risk but more so in ill animals.
- Possibility of damaging the parathyroid glands, which lie close to the thyroid and control the use of calcium in the body. Cats should be carefully monitored for a couple of weeks to make sure there are no changes in blood calcium caused by parathyroid gland damage.
- In rare cases tissue outside the gland may be producing thyroid hormone and therefore even with removing the thyroid gland the cat may continue to be hyperthyroid.

Radiation - An injection of radioactive iodine will destroy the abnormal thyroid tissue while leaving normal cells unaffected.

Advantages

- No anaesthetic required and very few unwanted side-effects.

- A single treatment will permanently cure the disease in 9 out of 10 cases and a second treatment will do the trick in most of the rest.
- Radiation will also work in much rarer cases in which the tumour is malignant or where a portion of thyroid tissue has broken away from the main gland and is normally missed during surgery.

Disadvantages

- Availability - there are only a few places offering the treatment because of tight regulations covering the use of radioactive substances and there is likely to be a waiting list.
- Your cat will have to stay in complete isolation until the radiation level has gone down, usually around four weeks.
- Your cat cannot be handled during this time and so this method is unsuitable for cats needing urgent treatment for other serious conditions.
- The cost of treatment and prolonged boarding can be high.