

ORAH Info:

Hyperthyroidism in Cats



Hyperthyroidism is one of the most common diseases of older cats. It is usually caused by benign overgrowth of the thyroid gland, but very rarely it can be caused by a malignant tumor.

SYMPTOMS

Overproduction of thyroid hormone means your cat's body is working harder and faster unnecessarily. As a result, cats' heart rates race and their blood pressure goes up; they burn more calories; and they will tend to be more vocal and energetic (some cats act like they are having a "second kittenhood"). These changes lead to weight loss and often cause vomiting, diarrhea, and sometimes increased thirst. The heart muscle can be overworked to the point of heart failure. High blood pressure can cause blindness from detached retinas and leads to other damaging changes. Hyperthyroidism also leads to changes in your cat's liver. Occasionally, skin problems can be related to hyperthyroidism.

DIAGNOSIS

Hyperthyroidism is easily diagnosed with a simple blood test. Often, if we suspect thyroid disease, we will also test the urine and blood pressure to see if other body systems are being affected.

TREATMENT

There are three main modes of treatment: medication, surgery, and radioactive iodine therapy. Each has its advantages.

The medicine is often given by mouth, but it can be specially made to be smeared inside the ear and absorbed through the skin. Medication is usually given twice daily. The treatment needs to be continued lifelong (if it is stopped, the thyroid goes back to being just as overactive as before). The medicine usually costs about \$30-40 per month. It is well-tolerated by most cats, but occasional side effects can include stomach upset and, very rarely, excessive scratching or changes in blood cells.

Surgical removal of the thyroid glands is a fairly simple procedure and can be a good choice for cats who are not suited to the medication. After surgery, in almost all cases, no medication is needed. The cost of surgery is about \$600-800. In rare cases, the thyroid gland can regrow a few years after surgery. Ideally, before going to surgery, we prefer to get the thyroid hormone under control with a few weeks of medication.

Radioactive iodine therapy is the "gold standard" of treatment for hyperthyroid cats. It is very safe and very effective (in almost all cases, for life). Cats stay at special centers for a few days to get this care. This treatment is offered locally by Dr. Bryan Harnett, DACVIM, at BEVS. For more information, see the website at <http://www.vvim.com/i131-clients.php>.

MONITORING

About three to four weeks after starting medication, we'll do a full physical exam and recheck your cat's blood values and weight to see that the medication is working. This is also a good time to recheck blood pressure and urine tests, or to run them if they were not done initially. Because hyperthyroidism can mask pre-existing kidney disease (another extremely common health issue in older cats), we want to make sure that once the thyroid disease is under control, we also know the kidneys' status.

PROGNOSIS

Cats whose thyroid disease is controlled live longer, healthier lives, and feel much better than those whose disease is not treated. Nearly all cats respond very well to treatment. Controlling hyperthyroidism can make the secondary heart disease disappear if we catch it early enough.

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