

# Hyperthyroidism



Hyperthyroidism is one of the most common diseases of middle aged and older cats and the most common hormonal disease in our feline friends. It is a serious condition but one that carries an excellent prognosis if treated in time. Untreated cats will lose weight, become ravenously hungry and develop heart and kidney complications that will ultimately lead to death. Some will become blind from hypertension (high blood pressure).

## Causes

Uncertain, but there doesn't appear to be any breed or sex predisposition.

Ultimately one or both of the thyroid glands enlarge (become goiters) and secrete increased amounts of thyroid hormone (T4) into the cats system. T4 will affect every cell in the body and will over-stimulate it leading to the following symptoms....

## Symptoms

The symptoms usually appear slowly over weeks and months rather than days. Owners often notice an increase in their pet's appetite as well as weight loss. It is very common for a cat owner to ignore these early warning signs and write them off to 'normal aging' or having worms.

The coat becomes dull and unkempt and they may become hyperactive or develop changes to their behaviour. As the heart muscle thickens and blood pressure rises the cat may become restless and breathe more rapidly. The blood pressure often goes over 200 mm of mercury! This level will easily damage the kidneys and cause blindness and even paralysis from blood clots.

They will be constantly ravenous, very skinny and in poor condition and the heart can easily be felt pounding against the ribs.

## Diagnosis

Diagnosis can be made on blood tests and the symptoms the cat is showing as well as a vet usually being able to feel the enlarged gland(s). Making a definitive diagnosis in the very early stages of the disease can be difficult as the thyroid hormone fluctuates daily.

## Treatment

Very successful in most patients. The prognosis is excellent in uncomplicated cases. Usually cats are put onto a drug called neo-mercazole for 2 to 3 weeks to stabilize them. After that there are three main treatment options:

1. Referral to a specialist for Radioiodine therapy – very safe and effective. Well over 90% of cats are cured with just one treatment! This is the best option.
2. Life long neo-mercazole tablets or compounded transdermal medication applied to the skin of the ear.
3. Hills y/d prescription diet, fed exclusively to reduce iodine intake and therefore T4 production.
4. Surgical removal of the affected tissue

Regular monitoring of T4 production and adjustment of drug dosages are required as per veterinarian advice.

Some cases may be complicated by the development of kidney and heart disease. These cases can be harder to manage and have a poorer prognosis but will still require treatment for hyperthyroidism.