



HYPERTHYROIDISM IN CATS

Hyperthyroidism describes the excessive production and excretion of hormone by the thyroid gland. It is one of the most frequently diagnosed disorders of aging cats. Causes of increased thyroid hormone include either benign enlargement of the gland (due to the aging process), or, rarely, a malignant tumor of the gland.

Clinical signs seen with hyperthyroidism relate to alterations in the cat's metabolism and include weight loss despite an increased appetite, hair loss and an unkempt coat, panting, nervousness, hyperactivity, and weakness; occasionally such other symptoms as vomiting, diarrhea, increased thirst and increased urination are seen. These signs appear very insidiously and are progressive. If untreated dramatic weight loss, irregular heartbeat and/or a heart murmur and further weakness develop. Typically, cardiovascular failure will result in collapse and death.

Diagnosis is based on blood test results. Fortunately, hyperthyroidism is treatable by one of three approaches:

- ❖ An oral (or topically applied) medication called *methimazole* may be given to control thyroid hormone production. Since the medication does not destroy the hormone-producing cells it must be given for the life of your pet. Occasional side effects include loss of appetite and/or vomiting. These symptoms usually resolve in 3-5 days. Higher dosage levels may also cause anemia. Administration of methimazole should correct hormone levels in 1-3 weeks. If there are no problems, we recheck thyroid hormone levels 3-4 weeks after starting the tablets and every 6-12 months thereafter.
- ❖ Radiation therapy of the gland can be performed at a referral facility. After a diagnostic workup that includes blood and urine testing and chest x-rays, your cat is hospitalized and given an injection of medication that selectively destroys the overactive thyroid hormone production requiring oral supplementation.
- ❖ Palpable nodules of the thyroid gland may be surgically removed. Prior to surgery, the nodules (and any others in the chest) are visualized by performing a thyroid scan at a referral facility; Tapazole is given orally for 1-3 weeks prior to surgery to stabilize hormone production, cervical nerve damage and/or increased anesthetic risks.

Please contact us at 478-7300 if you have any questions. We will be happy to assist in choosing the best treatment plan for your pet.