



Hyperthyroidism in cats



What is hyperthyroidism?

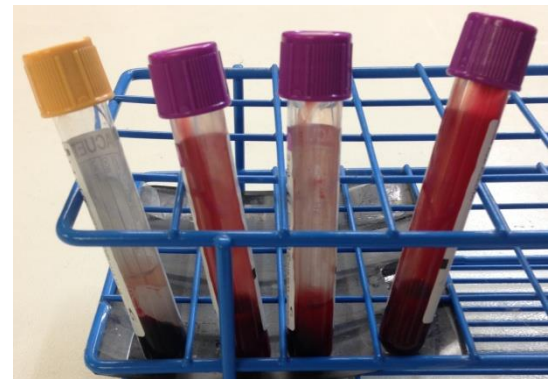
Hyperthyroidism is one of the most common hormonal disorders that occur in cats. The thyroid gland is responsible for producing thyroxine or thyroid hormone that helps maintain a normal metabolism and other normal body functions. It is often caused by a benign tumor affected one or both of the thyroid glands, causing an overproduction of the thyroid hormone. Hyperthyroidism results in increased metabolic rate, energy needs and activity levels. It is most common in cats 7 years and older, but can be seen in younger cats as well. Laboratory testing should be performed if clinical signs of hyperthyroidism are being seen in your cat.

Clinical signs of hyperthyroidism

- Increased thirst
- Increased urination
- Increased hunger / appetite
- Weight loss
- Increased activity
- Irritability
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Increased vocalization / change in vocalization
- Poor hair coat
- Other behavioural changes

Diagnosis

As there can be other medical conditions that may cause similar clinical signs, it is important for laboratory testing to confirm a diagnosis of hyperthyroidism with a complete blood count, chemistry, thyroid levels and urinalysis.



Treatment

1. Medications

Methimazole is one of the most common medication used in the treatment of feline hyperthyroidism. This medication interferes with the incorporation of iodine into thyroid hormone, therefore inhibiting its continued production. Methimazole is best given orally twice daily. Although side effects of methimazole are not often seen, the most common signs include gastrointestinal upset or facial itching.



2. Radioactive iodine

Radioactive iodine is considered the treatment of choice in appropriate candidates. Radioactive iodine is a safe and a more permanent way for treatment of hyperthyroidism. It involves the patient receiving a dose of chemotherapy that will reduce or eliminate the thyroid tumor that is over active. This would then allow the remaining thyroid tissue to start producing thyroid hormone at normal levels again. The rebound of the normal thyroid tissue may take 1-3 months. The large majority of patients will require only a single treatment for the thyroid levels to normalize.

Patients with concurrent medical conditions, such as kidney disease, may not be good candidates for this form of treatment.

In British Columbia, there is a treatment center in Vancouver called North West Nuclear Medicine or the Iodine Café. A patient will typically stay at the Café for 5-7 days for treatment and after care.

3. Therapeutic diets

There is a therapeutic diet called Hill's y/d that is a specially formulated low iodine diet. Thyroid hormone production requires iodine therefore the diet reduces overall thyroid hormone production indirectly. This diet needs to be fed exclusively, with no other forms of foods or treats being fed.



Follow up care

Once a treatment plan has been chosen for the patient based on patient and household needs, the cat will require continued medical progress care. After starting medications, re-testing blood values, including kidney values and complete blood count 1 month later is done to ensure normal thyroid levels were achieved. Thyroid levels are re-tested after every dosing change and routinely every 6 months with re-assessment of weight, appetite, attitude, thirst, urination changes as well as cardiac re-assessment if a secondary murmur or arrhythmia was noted.

Blood pressure should be monitored and assessed for hypertension, as this can be common secondary to hyperthyroidism. It is possible for blood pressure to normalize once thyroid levels have normalized.

What to expect

It can be scary to learn of a diagnosis of hyperthyroidism in a loved pet. Your veterinary team at Nanaimo Veterinary Hospital wants to work with you to help improve your cat's quality of life. We want to work together to help you maintain the special bond you have with your pet. We are here to support you and your pet along this journey. Please contact us with any questions or concerns that you may have at 250-758-3985 or by email at nveth@shaw.ca

Additional Reading

Hyperthyroidism Medication for Cats (Veterinary Partners)
<https://www.vin.com/veterinarypartner/default.aspx?pid=19239&id=4951394>

Northwest Nuclear Medicine, The Iodine Café www.iodinecafe.com

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