



Thyroid problems in cats...

Older cats aged about 10 years or more can suffer from an overactive thyroid gland. This condition is called Hyperthyroidism. The condition builds up over time and can be 'missed' as the signs build up slowly. Many people would attribute the signs to old age.

the signs...

- Weight loss over time
- An enthusiastic appetite
- Occasional diarrhoea
- A heart murmur
- High heart rate
- Hyperactivity

Other signs may be seen, which include swelling in the neck (sometimes referred to as goitre, meaning enlargement of the thyroid gland(s)). The thyroid glands are situated on either side of the windpipe in the neck, but occasionally can also occur within the chest. In this condition the thyroid gland produces excessive levels of thyroid hormone. This acts to raise the level of your cat's metabolism. Thus your cat becomes hyperactive and loses weight even though the appetite is increased as well. The intestines may have increased activity leading to diarrhoea.

This increase in hormone also causes the heart rate to increase and this may lead to the heart being unable to push blood around the body as effectively as it used to. This can be detected by your veterinary surgeon as a murmur. In all cases there is a rapid heart rate.

Making a diagnosis

A blood sample is taken from your cat's leg or neck. Your veterinary surgeon may advise a general screen first to ensure that there are no underlying other conditions, such as kidney problems.

The diagnosis is confirmed by means of a blood test, which shows how much thyroid hormone is present. The excessive thyroid hormone is produced by a tumour of the thyroid gland. Usually the tumour is benign, and only very rarely malignant. Left untreated, an affected cat is likely to become very underweight, and over time can develop serious heart problems, high blood pressure or other changes, which can be fatal.

What happens if my cat is hyperthyroid?

At the current time, there are several treatments available. Each has its own benefits and drawbacks. Not all options are suitable for each case, and so each case must be considered individually. **These include...**

1. ORAL MEDICATION

This involves giving tablets by mouth, once or twice daily, for the life of the patient. This can provide good control of the condition by stopping the thyroid tumour from over-producing thyroid hormone. The condition is not cured, but is controlled well in many patients.

2. SURGERY

This procedure has the advantage that, in successful cases, no medication is required after the operation. The condition is cured.

Surgery involves your cat having an anaesthetic and the overactive gland is removed. There are two thyroid glands. In some cases only one gland is overactive. If only one side is overactive the second will be very small. As a result the second side is not removed at this time. It is possible in some cases for the second gland to become overactive in the future. Generally this does not occur for a long time. If it becomes a problem then the operation is repeated.

3. RADIO-IODINE TREATMENT

This requires a dose of radioactive iodine to be given to your cat as an injection, which then selectively destroys the thyroid gland tumour, without affecting any other organ. The injection is given in the same way as vaccination, under the skin in the scruff. A general anaesthetic is not usually required, unless your cat is difficult to handle in which case sedation will have to be given first, to safeguard the vet who gives the iodine injection. No tablets are required afterwards. The dose your cat will receive will depend on the thyroid blood test, and other factors. This helps to keep the dose to a minimum, which in turn helps to keep the hospitalisation period to the minimum. It may take 2-3 months for a patient to show the maximum benefit from the injection. The parathyroid glands (responsible for calcium metabolism) are not affected, and there is usually no need for thyroid supplementation after treatment.

Currently there have been no reported cases of a treated patient relapsing after radio-iodine treatment, but some patients may require more than one injection to respond. It is the vet's decision as to whether your cat is appropriate for radio-iodine treatment. This form of treatment is only available at specialist veterinary centres, further guidance will be given by your vet.