

Hyperthyroidism in Cats

General Information

Hyperthyroidism is a disease of older cats, caused by excessive production of thyroid hormones. The usual cause for increased hormone production is a tumor of the thyroid gland. These tumors may be benign (non-cancerous) or malignant (cancerous). The reason these glands develop tumors is not known.

Signs of excessive thyroid hormone production include weight loss despite a ravenous appetite, frequent bowel movements, increased thirst and urination, restlessness, frequent crying or vocalizing, neglect of normal grooming and rapid heartbeat. The effects on the heart may be severe and result in congestive heart failure and death.

Surgical removal of the thyroid gland is the recommended treatment. If the gland is totally removed, replacement thyroid hormone is given for life.

Treatment with radioactive iodine is also an excellent form of therapy. This treatment, however, requires the availability of nuclear medicine facilities and isolation of the cat during treatment.

When serious heart disease has already occurred, treatment with anti-thyroid drugs is used until the cat is healthy enough to undergo surgery. However, long-term medical treatment with these drugs is not recommended because the tumor may be malignant and spread to other areas during treatment and because these drugs can have serious side effects with long-term use. Nevertheless, in certain older cats and cats that are poor surgical risks, long-term drug therapy may be the best type of treatment.

Important Points in Treatment

1. A complete examination, including blood tests and radiographs (x-rays), is performed before surgery to be sure the tumor, if present, has not spread to other organs and to evaluate the condition of the heart and other internal organs.
2. Thyroid hormone levels are checked after surgery and during drug therapy to determine the proper replacement dose.
3. *Medication:* Medication must be given as directed. Call the doctor if you cannot medicate your pet properly.

Notify the Doctor if Any of the Following Occur

- Your pet has trouble breathing or swallowing.
- Your pet's signs continue to worsen.
- Your pet does not gain weight.