



Hyperthyroidism in Cats

Excessive production of thyroid hormones is a common disorder in older cats. Thyroid hormone is produced by the thyroid glands which are paired glands located in the neck. The causes of the increased activity of the thyroid glands or ways to prevent the disorder are not known. Thyroid hormones affect many body systems which makes the symptoms of hyperthyroidism variable. Weight loss, vomiting, increased appetite, increased thirst, increased urination, and hyper-excitability may all be seen with hyperthyroidism. The heart, kidneys and eyes can be severely affected by this disease, making early diagnosis and treatment very important.

Diagnosis:

Hyperthyroidism is diagnosed with blood tests to determine thyroid levels. A few cats will need further testing to confirm the suspected diagnosis. Routine thyroid screening is advised for all cats over 10 years of age. A complete medical workup may be recommended to evaluate internal organ function and to help make a decision regarding the best means of treatment.

Treatment:

1) Medical treatment: Anti-thyroid drugs are given to decrease the production of thyroid hormones. The medication needs to be given for life. Some cats will have side effects from these drugs and careful monitoring is necessary. Blood tests should be checked at ten days, then again in one month to monitor thyroid function and to test for reactions to the medication. After that, tests are scheduled every six months as long as the cat is doing well. If the medication is effective, it will need to be given for life.

2) Radiation treatment: This method is available through the UW Veterinary Teaching Hospital in Madison, WI. It is a good treatment option, especially for younger cats.

3) Surgical treatment: This method removes the abnormal thyroid tissue. Careful monitoring is necessary after the surgery, and some cats will require thyroid supplementation after this procedure. This treatment option is not often recommended.

Hyperthyroidism is a complex disease, but many cats can be successfully managed and do very well. Your veterinarian can discuss the details of this disease and help you decide which therapy is best for your pet.