



## Feline Hyperthyroidism



Hyperthyroidism is the most common hormonal disorder in male and female, middle-aged to senior cats. It is so common, that most veterinarians screen for it during a cat's twice-a-year senior wellness exam. The incidence of hyperthyroidism is increasing, perhaps due in part to heightened awareness and screening as well as the fact that cats are now living longer than ever before. Fortunately, several effective treatments are available and, with early diagnosis, treatment is usually successful.

In most cases, hyperthyroidism is caused by benign nodules (called *adenomas*) that form on one or both lobes of the thyroid gland. This causes the gland to produce excessive amounts of thyroid hormones. These hormones regulate metabolism, including the rate at which your cat's body burns calories, and ultimately affect every system in the body. Your veterinarian may be able to feel the enlarged lobes, located in the front of the neck on either side of the windpipe, and will confirm the diagnosis with a lab test to check thyroid hormone levels in the blood.

The most common signs of hyperthyroidism in cats are:

- ✓ Weight loss despite good appetite.
- ✓ Increased thirst and urination.
- ✓ Restlessness or behavior changes.
- ✓ Vomiting and diarrhea.

- ✓ Unkempt hair coat with excessive shedding.

Hyperthyroidism can also affect your cat's heart and your veterinarian may detect a rapid heartbeat or heart murmur during your cat's twice-a-year senior wellness exam. This can be an early sign of hypertrophic cardiomyopathy, a serious consequence of untreated hyperthyroidism. This disease causes the muscle wall of your cat's heart to become thickened, eventually leading to heart failure and death. Other cardiac signs and symptoms can include: high blood pressure, weakness, hind limb paralysis, panting, or labored breathing.

**Because hyperthyroidism is so common and can be treated, every middle-aged or older cat with any of these symptoms should be tested for hyperthyroidism.**

Once a diagnosis of hyperthyroidism has been made, your veterinarian will discuss the following treatment options with you:

- Medical treatment with an oral anti-thyroid medication (Methimazole).
- Surgery to remove the abnormal thyroid lobe (thyroidectomy).
- Radioactive iodine therapy.

Each treatment option has its advantages and disadvantages, and the choice of therapy may depend on your cat's overall health, the severity of symptoms and extent of disease, availability (of radioactive iodine), and the expense involved with each option.

**Early detection increases the chances of treatment success in most feline diseases, including hyperthyroidism. As your cat enters his or her senior years, visiting your veterinarian twice a year for senior care wellness exams becomes more important than ever!**