



## Feline Hyperthyroidism

Hyperthyroidism is one of the most common hormonal diseases of older cats. It occurs when the thyroid gland releases too much thyroid hormone into the bloodstream.

Thyroid hormone regulates the activity in the rest of the body. When there is too much of it, normal processes are sent into overdrive. This speeding metabolism is a physical drain on the cat. Signs are frequently interpreted as "getting old", but in fact are symptoms of disease.

- Weight loss/Increased appetite
- Nervousness/agitation
- Changes in sleeping patterns
- Poor grooming activity
- Increased drinking and urination
- Difficulty jumping
- Seeking out cool places
- Vomiting/diarrhea

Diagnosis of hyperthyroidism is made by blood tests. Thyroid levels should be done in combination with a complete blood chemistry, CBC and urinalysis as hyperthyroidism can mimic other diseases seen in older cats, (diabetes, kidney failure.)

There are several treatment options for hyperthyroidism:

1. Methimazole - Oral medication that is given once or twice daily for the *rest of the cat's life*. Can be compounded into a transdermal gel, but absorption is questionable.
2. Surgery - If the hyperactive thyroid gland can be felt in the neck, it can be surgically removed. There is a chance of recurrence from other thyroid tissue. Some hyperthyroid cats are poor candidates for surgery due to their debilitated condition.
3. Radioactive iodine - This is the best option in terms of longterm cure of the disease. It requires a several day hospitalization at a specialty hospital and a few changes at home before the treatment. Although this is the best option, it is also the most expensive in the short term.
4. Prescription Diet y/d food - This is an iodine restricted diet that manages excess thyroid levels. It must be fed exclusively for it to be effective.

A hyperthyroid cat, once properly controlled and monitored, can lead a happy and normal life. Periodic measuring of the thyroid level and kidney function are needed to ensure proper dosing and to catch complications early. If untreated, these cats will suffer on-going debilitation, heart problems and possibly premature death.