

HYPOTHYROIDISM IN CATS

What is hypothyroidism?

The thyroid gland consists of two lobes that sit like a saddle over the windpipe at the base of the neck. The gland is most well known for its role in controlling metabolism (the processes that repair and maintain the body) and body growth. Hyperthyroidism results from over-production of the thyroid hormone, thyroxine. The more of this hormone that is produced, the higher the metabolic rate – and the more calories the cat burns as energy.

Which cats are most likely to get hyperthyroidism?

Hyperthyroidism is most often seen in cats between 7 to 12 years of age. All types of cats, neutered or entire, can be susceptible to the disease.

What are the symptoms?

Excess thyroxine affects every organ in the cat's body. Muscles, heart, stomach, intestines, urinary and nervous systems are all affected. The disease will also change a cat's behaviour. The classic symptoms are weight loss, despite an increased appetite, rapid heart rate and an scruffy looking coat. Complications resulting from hyperthyroidism include heart enlargement, increased blood pressure, kidney damage and intestinal problems. Sometimes the enlarged thyroid gland can be felt at the base of the cat's neck. This condition can be diagnosed by a simple blood test.

How can it be treated?

Hyperthyroidism in cats may be treated in one of three ways:

1. Medical management

Anti-thyroid hormone medications can be used. The dose needs careful monitoring in the initial stages but once stabilized, the cat will should lead a happy, normal life on a daily maintenance dose.

2. Surgical thyroidectomy

This technique is often successfully used, sometimes after stabilisation with medical management. The procedure may need to be performed in two stages, such that the diseased tissue is removed from one side of the throat and the normal function of the gland is given time to restore itself before surgery is carried out on the other side.

3. Radioactive iodine therapy

This is regarded as a safe and effective cure, but is only available at a very small number of clinics in the UK and does involve a long period of hospitalisation.

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