

Hyperthyroidism

The thyroid gland controls the basic level of metabolism of all aspects of the body. When cats become hyperthyroid, all of the body's normal functions increase; the heart beats faster, calories burn quicker, and the liver is forced to work harder than it usually does. Sometimes cats will become twitchy and hyperactive as well. If a cat becomes hyperthyroid and the problem is not treated, they will waste away and will usually die from heart failure or severe weight loss.

Hyperthyroid cats are almost always the result of a non-cancerous enlargement of the thyroid gland resulting in excessive hormone release. While cancerous thyroid tumors have been documented they are extremely uncommon.

Signs often seen with Hyperthyroid cats:

Increased thirst and appetite, weight loss, increased activity

Occasional signs: weakness, coughing, twitchiness, seizures.



Diagnosis

If we feel an enlarged thyroid gland on your cat's neck during its physical exam, we immediately think of thyroid disease. However, you can have hyperthyroidism with a normal sized gland, and you can have an enlarged thyroid gland which is normal. Usually we test for thyroid disease whenever we have an older cat that is mysteriously losing weight. Other diseases we check for simultaneously are liver disease, kidney disease, diabetes and cancer.

Often cats with thyroid problems will have elevations of their liver enzymes and dilute urine, due to the elevation of their metabolism from excess thyroid hormones. Usually these abnormalities disappear once we have initiated treatment.

Treatment

Treatment usually consists of either giving your cat an injection of Radioactive Iodine to destroy the abnormal thyroid tissue, or giving your cat an oral medication called Tapazole to suppress the release of excess thyroid hormone from the abnormal gland. The Radioactive Iodine is a cure for the disease, and it is almost always the preferred therapy over the oral medication, although in some older cats with kidney failure as well as thyroid disease, Tapazole is preferred. Surgery was once the preferred treatment, but there are significant limitations with surgery and at this time it is not the recommended therapy.

At first we put all cats on oral Tapazole therapy to get the condition under control, after 3-4 weeks on Tapazole we rerun the Thyroid level to see how successful our dose is, and we rerun a CBC to make sure that your cat is not showing any side-effects from the Tapazole. These side effects can include: low platelet and white blood cell counts, as well as anemia in rare cases. Some cats on Tapazole also will vomit, have diarrhea and not eat well. For cats that have any of these side effects from the medication, we recommend moving on to the Radioactive Iodine Therapy.

Radioactive Iodine Therapy is preferred for most Hyperthyroid cats, but it does cost \$1500 to do. There is a specialist in Wakefield that does these treatments under the name: Radiocat (1-800-323-9729, www.radiocat.com). The cost is high, but over time with the Tapazole, you will likely spend more on the medication and the repeated blood tests. Plus with the Radioactive Iodine, there is no more medication to give, ever!

Recently a special diet has been developed for cats with hyperthyroidism. This diet is made by Hill's Science Diet and is called Y/D. Y/D is an iodine restricted diet. Since the only hormone in the body that has iodine in it is the thyroid hormone, limiting iodine should reduce the levels of thyroid hormone in the body. For this diet to work properly, it must be the only food your cat eats. Any people food or cat treat could cause the diet not to work. This diet is new and we have had some experience with it. It may become a good alternative to medication.

Our Plan for your cat

Medication: Tapazole _____ orally twice a day

At the end of the first 3-4 weeks we will recheck his Thyroid level, and a CBC.

Please let us know if the medication makes your cat vomit, or if your cat seems especially listless on this medication.

We think it is best for your cat to eat _____ Diet.

Other tests:

We will / will not need to retest your cat's liver and kidney blood values in _____ months

We will / will not need to retest your cat's Thyroid hormone levels in _____ months

We will / will not need to retest your cat's CBC levels in _____ months

We will / will not need to test your cat's urine at the next visit.

Jonathan Cote is our technician who deals exclusively with our hyperthyroid patients. If you have a question regarding your cat's therapy, please call our office, and if Dr. Spodick is not available, then Jonathan can talk to you about what is best for your cat.