

Feline Hyperthyroidism:

Hyperthyroidism or the over-activity of the thyroid gland is the most common disorder involving the endocrine system of glands seen in cats. It is also one of the most frequent conditions seen in geriatric cats.

Symptoms Include:

- Increased appetite with marked weight loss or emaciation
- Increased thirst and urination
- Restless, anxiety or hyperactivity
- Increased vocal activity, often wailing or crying
- Irritability, sometimes with aggressive facial expressions
- Heart problems, sometimes leading to cardiomyopathy
- Poor coat with reduced grooming activity, sometimes matted hair
- Alopecia (hair loss)
- Seborrhoea (greasy coat) or a dry harsh coat
- Increased rate of nail growth
- Diarrhea and vomiting
- Heat intolerance
- Coughing and sneezing, increased respiratory (breathing) rate

Diagnosis:

The most reliable diagnostic test is the measurement of the level of T4 in the blood, which is elevated in the most hyperthyroid cats. This is done with a simple blood draw in clinic and the results are often available within minutes. Sometimes results may need to be sent to an outside lab if the blood is too lipemic (fatty).

Treatment:

The most common way of treating this problem involves using anti-thyroid drugs which work by reducing the production and release of thyroid hormone from the thyroid gland. Although the use of such drugs does not result in a cure, the condition can be managed long terms if the drugs are well tolerated. The most commonly used drugs in Methimazole. Side effects are not common, but can include vomiting, lethargy and poor appetite. A few cats show more serious reactions such as a drop in the number of platelets or white cells in the blood, disturbances in liver functions or skin rashes. All of these problems are reversible if the drugs are withdrawn.

Additional Complications:

The abnormally high levels of thyroid hormones in the blood have far ranging effects on the body. In fact, almost all organ systems are affected often requiring additional investigation and treatment.

Heart Problems: The main problems seen with the heart and circulation are hypertrophic or less frequently dilated cardiomyopathy, hypertension (high blood pressure with subsequent damage to eyes, kidneys and brain), rapid heart rate (tachycardia), heart murmurs, arrhythmias (changes in rhythm) and congestive heart failure.

Kidney Disease: Many cats with hyperthyroidism will have concurrent chronic kidney (renal) failure, which may well be masked by the thyroid condition. This is due to an increase in the blood flow to the kidneys appearing to make the parameters that determine kidney function appear normal. In such cases patients need to have their renal function re-evaluated once the thyroid problem is stable.