Hyperthyroidism in Cats

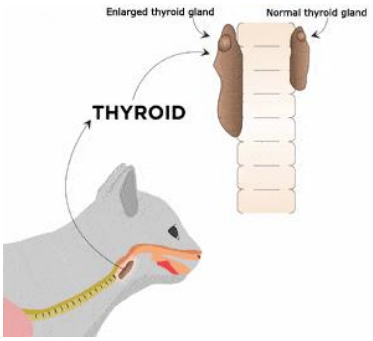
What is it?

One of the most common hormone imbalances in cats is hyperthyroidism.

Although this was discovered rather recently in modern medicine, this condition is seen very frequently, especially in older cats.

Thyroid hormones are involved with metabolism by setting the metabolic rate. They come from the thyroid gland, which sits on the neck where the trachea (windpipe) is. The active form of the thyroid hormone is called T3, and is directly affects all cells of the body. The inactive form is called T4, which you may hear about a lot more often, as blood tests often relate to this form in the blood.

What does the condition look like?



Because this hormone affects all the cells in the body, there are many clinical signs. However, the tell-tale sign for hyperthyroidism is weight loss with a great appetite. Another common clinical sign is increased urination and drinking. They are also easily agitated and restless. There can also be having intermittent vomiting and diarrhoea for a long period of time.

The thyroid gland generally cannot be felt in a normal cat. However, in a true hyperthyroid cat, the lobes of the thyroid gland can be prominent and felt by your veterinarian, called a “thyroid flick.” 95% of enlarged thyroid glands are benign.

Diagnosis and treatment

A blood test is done to measure the amount of T4 in the blood.

If this value is very elevated, a confident diagnosis can be made.

If the value is borderline, more specific blood tests such as a Free T4 is considered. Nuclear medicine scans are also available but this is only done is specialist facilities.

Without treatment, these cats will have a reduced quality of life through weight loss, decreased muscling, vomiting, diarrhoea, heart disease, high blood pressure, blindness and sudden death.

Thankfully, this treatment can be treated in a variety of ways.

Medication	Dietary	Radiotherapy	Surgery
- Oral tablets - Ointment on the ears - Cheaper than radiotherapy or surgery - Side effects relatively uncommon	- Hill's y/d - Minimal side effects - Takes 12 weeks to work - Strictly on this diet only! - Ineffective in 10% of cats	- A one-time safe and most effective treatment method - Requires hospitalisation for days, strict safety protocols needed - Not a good idea for a cat with poor kidney function - Done at specialist hospital	- Not recommended - Anaesthetic risk - Close to important nerves – requires excellent surgical technique - Requires specialist imaging for surgical planning - Can cause imbalance to calcium levels

Dr Alex