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Feline Hyperthyroidism

Feline hyperthyroidism is a common condition that develops in older cats, the average age at diagnosis is around 13 years old. Symptoms of hyperthyroidism include weight loss despite excellent appetite, increase in water drinking, increase in urine output, restlessness, rapid heart rate and sometimes hair loss or failure to groom. Enlargement of the thyroid gland is also a classic sign that can be found during a routine physical exam, but cats can still have hyperthyroidism without a palpable thyroid gland. Diagnosis is made through a simple blood test that measures the amount of thyroid hormone in your pets system.

Once your pet is diagnosed with hyperthyroidism, there are several different ways to treat the condition. Hyperthyroidism can be treated with medications and no matter what treatment option you choose, your pets veterinarian will probably put your pet on oral medication called Tapazole or Methimazole for a period of time. The oral medication blocks the production of thyroid hormone, therefore lowering the amount in your pets system. Bloodwork needs to be done periodically while your pet is on Methimazole to make sure your pet is on the correct dose and the thyroid hormone levels are coming down to the right level or not going too low. The monitoring blood tests with also check some kidney and liver values, which sometimes can be affected by this medication. Other possible side effects include, vomiting, lethargy or facial itching. If you choose to treat your pets hyperthyroidism with medication only, it will be a

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medication that they will need to take for the rest of their life and will require your pet to have blood tests done at least every 6 months.

Another option for treating hyperthyroidism is surgical removal of the enlarged thyroid gland. Surgical removal of the affected gland or thyroidectomy is generally curative of the hyperthyroidism and thyroid medication is not needed after surgery. As with any pet who is about to undergo surgery, a preoperative evaluation is essential to evaluate your pet's risk for anesthesia prior to surgery. This is especially important for pets with hyperthyroidism because of a condition called hypertrophic cardiomyopathy which may develop due to the hyperthyroidism. Hypertrophic cardiomyopathy is a condition where the walls of the heart become thickened. It will not prevent your pet from having surgery, but if suspected, should be evaluated prior to any anesthetic experience. Surgery involves your pet coming in between 8:00am and 8:15am and staying with us for most of the day. A great deal of care is taken to maintain your pet's health and happiness during their hospital stay. IV catheters are placed as an added safety precaution and for the administration of IV fluids prior to and during the procedure. Your pet will be monitored by one of our certified veterinary technicians or well-trained staff throughout the surgical procedure and post surgical time. All patients are also given pain relief medication before and after the procedure as well as being sent home with medication for their continued recovery at home. Usually only one of the two thyroid glands is enlarged and removed during a thyroidectomy. Should your pet need their second thyroid gland removed, additional precautions need to be taken due to the possibility of hypocalcemia or low blood calcium. This is because the tiny parathyroid gland, which helps to regulate blood calcium is adjacent to the thyroid gland and may

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become damaged during surgery to remove the thyroid. If your pet has both thyroid glands removed, they will need to stay in the hospital overnight and have additional bloodwork done to monitor their calcium levels.

The final treatment option for hyperthyroidism is radioactive iodine treatment. This is a treatment done at a specialty clinic where a radioactive form of iodine is injected into your pet, where it then goes directly to the thyroid and kills the abnormal tissue. Treatment is a one time event, but pets are required to stay at the specialty facility for a period of time, usually 3-5 days due to the shedding of radioactive molecules. Some special procedures will also need to be taken after your pet comes home, such as special disposal of litter, limiting the amount of snuggling you do with your pet, and washing your hands after prolonged close contact for about 2 weeks after your pet comes home. If you would like more information, please talk to one of our staff members for the name of a clinic or hospital that performs this procedure.