



Feline Hyperthyroidism

Feline hyperthyroidism is a common condition that develops in older cats, the average age at diagnosis being around 13 years old. Symptoms of hyperthyroidism include weight loss despite excellent appetite, increased water consumption, increased 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 may 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 bloodstream.

Once your pet is diagnosed with hyperthyroidism, there are several options to treat or control the condition. Hyperthyroidism can be treated with an oral medication called Tapazole® or Methimazole . No matter what treatment option you choose, your pets veterinarian will prescribe this medication for a period of time. The oral medication blocks the release 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 that the thyroid hormone levels are coming down to the right level and not going too low. The monitoring blood tests will also check kidney, liver and bone marrow function, which can sometimes be adversely affected by this medication. Other possible side effects include, vomiting, lethargy, skin rashes or facial itching. If you choose to treat your pets hyperthyroidism with medication only, it will be a medication that they will need to take for the rest of their life and will require your pet to have blood tests every few weeks during the first few months then every 4-6 months once stable.

Another option for treating hyperthyroidism is surgical removal of the enlarged thyroid gland. Surgical removal of the affected gland, 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 pets risk for anesthesia prior to surgery. This is especially important for pets with hyperthyroidism if they have developed a secondary heart condition called hypertrophic cardiomyopathy 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 or treated prior to any anesthetic experience. Surgery

involves admitting your pet between 8:00am and 8:15am and having them stay with us for most of the day. A great deal of care is taken to maintain your pet's health and minimize risks during their procedure. IV catheters are placed 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 surgical staff from the induction of anesthesia through recovery. All patients are also given pain relief medication before and after the procedure. Medication is dispensed for their continued comfort during their recovery at home. Usually only one of the two thyroid glands is enlarged and removed during a thyroidectomy. Almost 50% of pets will need their second thyroid gland removed at a later date, usually 2-3 years later. If this is done, 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 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 a low level radioactive iodine treatment. This treatment is done at a specialty clinic where a radioactive form of iodine is administered to your pet, where it then goes directly to the thyroid and the radiation kills the normal and abnormal thyroid tissue. This 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 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.