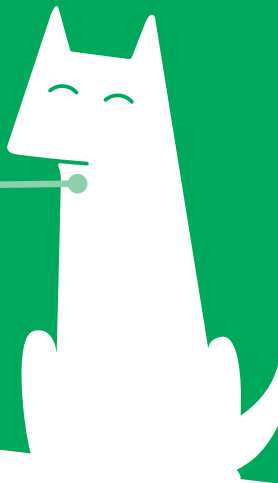
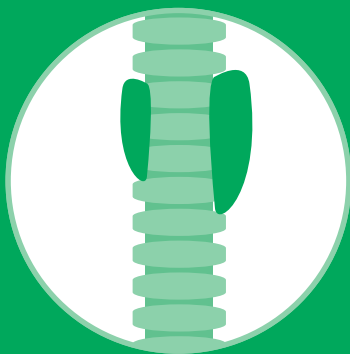


Hyperthyroidism



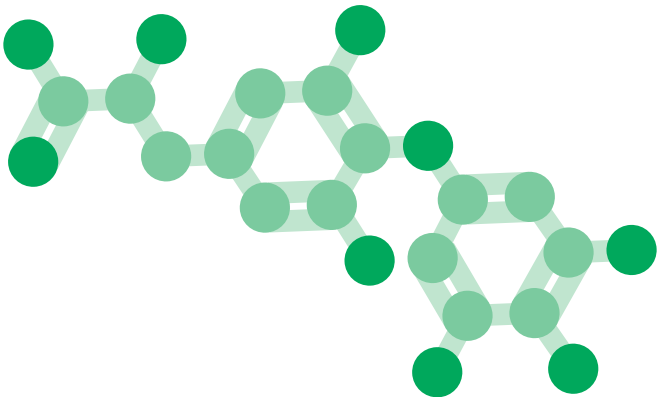
CATS PROTECTION
VETERINARY GUIDE 12



The thyroid is made up of two glands located on either side of the windpipe at the base of your cat's neck. These glands produce thyroxine, a hormone which helps to regulate their metabolic rate. In some cats, the thyroid becomes overactive and produces excessive amounts of thyroxine. This is called hyperthyroidism and it speeds up the metabolism.

What causes hyperthyroidism?

Scientists do not know what causes the thyroid to change. Although it is seen in younger cats occasionally, it mainly affects cats over the age of 10 and can occur in either one or both of the glands.



What are the signs?

The signs seen in hyperthyroidism are due to the metabolic rate speeding up. They may vary from cat to cat but most commonly include:

- increased appetite and/or thirst
- weight loss
- behavioural changes such as hyperactivity, restlessness and being more vocal
- vomiting
- diarrhoea
- poor coat condition
- enlargement of the thyroid gland
- fast heart rate

If left untreated, hyperthyroidism will begin to affect other major organs such as the heart or the liver and will eventually be fatal.

How is hyperthyroidism diagnosed?

A diagnosis is made through measuring the level of thyroxine in a blood sample.

What are the treatment options?

Hyperthyroidism can be managed with a medication, surgery or radiation and in some cases, feeding a veterinary diet.

Medication

Drugs are available which block the production of thyroxine by the thyroid gland. They come in tablet form and need to be given every day for life – once or twice daily depending on the specific drug and the individual cat. Blood samples need to be checked periodically to ensure that thyroid levels are within the normal range and, if not, the dosage will need to be adjusted.

Advantages of medication:

- relatively cheap
- simple
- no surgery or hospitalisation required

Disadvantages of medication:

- not a permanent cure – medication must be given for life
- some cats are not easy to give tablets to
- can produce side-effects, including poor appetite, vomiting or anaemia
- periodic blood tests will be required to monitor the condition

Surgery

This involves removing one or both glands of the thyroid under general anaesthesia.

Advantages of surgery:

- successful surgery is a permanent cure
- the procedure is fairly routine

Disadvantages of surgery:

- cats may need to be treated medically prior to surgery to bring levels of thyroxine under control – uncontrolled hyperthyroid cats are high risk anaesthetic cases
- if one gland is affected and removed, the other side may become affected at a later date, causing symptoms to recur – both sides may be removed to prevent this
- in cases where a malignant tumour is present in the thyroid it can be difficult to remove completely
- a small percentage of hyperthyroid cats may have 'ectopic' thyroid tissue out of reach, so remain hyperthyroid after removal of the thyroid glands in the neck. Sometimes the glands present in the neck may slip into the thorax, making their surgical removal more difficult
- small glands next to the thyroid called parathyroid glands help control calcium levels in the body – these can sometimes be damaged during surgery, causing low levels of calcium to develop which can be life threatening
- surgery may not be suitable for cats with other ongoing problems
- Kidney disease can be masked by hyperthyroidism and may only become apparent after surgery

Radiation

With this irreversible treatment, cats are injected with radioactive iodine which destroys the abnormal thyroid tissue while leaving the normal cells unaffected.

Advantages of radiation:

- no anaesthetic is required
- usually the problem is cured completely with one or two treatments
- it can be a good alternative to surgery if a malignant tumour is present on the thyroid

Disadvantages of radiation:

- cannot be performed routinely at local practices – only a few centres where it can be performed exist in the UK
- requires hospitalisation and complete isolation for several weeks – the cat cannot be handled during this time due to the radiation levels in the body
- more expensive than medication or surgery
- may unmask any underlying kidney disease, if present, in the same way as surgery



Diet

A veterinary diet has recently become available which contains low levels of iodine and may help to normalise thyroid levels in hyperthyroid cats. However, it must be fed as the only source of food – with no access to other food, including prey. The long-term effects of feeding a low-iodine diet to cats are currently uncertain.

Each cat and owner is different, so it is important to discuss the different treatment options with your vet to decide what is best for your particular cat.

What does the future hold?

Once a cat is treated they will return to normal fairly quickly in most cases. If the disease has been detected and treated early on, the cat often lives several more years.

Learn more about your cat online!

Take a look at our free interactive tool to help you understand cats' origins and their behaviour within our homes. <http://learnonline.cats.org.uk/content/ufo>

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Reg Charity 203644 (England and Wales) and SC037711 (Scotland)

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