

Hyperthyroidism and Your Cat: A Client Handout

Humans have enjoyed the companionship of their four-footed friends for centuries. Part of Banfield The Pet Hospital's® vision is to educate Pet Parents on how better Pet care will maximize the life of their Pet as well as their own. Pets are members of the family and it is Banfield's pleasure and honor to treat your family member. Your cat has been diagnosed with **hyperthyroidism**, a treatable disease. This handout will help introduce you to some of the terms and treatments that accompany this diagnosis.

What is hyperthyroidism and why is it harmful?

Hyperthyroidism is the most common endocrine disorder that affects cats. It creates a wide range of symptoms resulting from the overproduction of hormone produced by the thyroid gland (located in the throat region near the voice box). The thyroid hormone's main function is to set the cat's metabolic rate at the right pace. Too much hormone causes an overactive metabolism and too little causes a sluggish metabolism. Cats usually develop hyperthyroidism through the development of an adenoma (tumor) in the thyroid gland. This benign tumor is primarily made up of thyroid cells and this increase in cells creates an increase in the secretion of thyroid hormone. Hyperthyroidism usually occurs in adult cats (5 years and older) with most cats developing symptoms in their early teens. The exact reason that cats develop these tumors is not currently known.

The symptoms for this disease are wide and variable with the most common client concerns being; weight loss, increased activity, increased food and water consumption, and vomiting. An increased heart rate or a heart murmur are also common discoveries on physical examination.

Hyperthyroidism sets your cat's "idle system" on high. This internal stress can cause damage to a variety of body systems and organs such as the kidneys and heart. Without treatment, these systems become overstressed and can begin to fail.

How is feline hyperthyroidism diagnosed?

Hyperthyroidism is diagnosed by measuring the level of thyroid hormone in the blood. There are two different thyroid hormones produced by the thyroid gland, thyroxine (T4) and triiodothyronine (T3). High T4 levels indicates hyperthyroidism in cats. Elevated T3 levels can also indicate hyperthyroidism.

How will the doctor treat my hyperthyroid cat?

There are currently three common ways to treat hyperthyroidism in cats. They include treatment with Radioactive Iodine, surgical removal of the affected glands and treatment with anti-thyroid medication. All of these treatments have their advantages and

disadvantages and some are better than others depending on your cat's situation. Be sure to discuss the pros and cons of each option with your family and Banfield doctor.

Radioactive Iodine: Radioactive Iodine therapy provides a simple, effective, and safe treatment for cats with hyperthyroidism. The basic principle behind treatment of hyperthyroidism with radioiodine is that thyroid cells do not differentiate between stable and Radioactive Iodine. After injection, radioiodine is concentrated by the thyroid gland where it irradiates and destroys the cancerous cells. The healthy tissue is not damaged by this treatment. Radioactive Iodine treatment is performed at specialty hospitals and your cat will need to stay there several days, to several weeks, until the radioactive material clears from his body.

Antithyroid Medication: The use of oral antithyroid medication is still a very popular choice for the treatment of hyperthyroidism in the cat. The drug that is used is methimazole (Tapazole). Tapazole is a human medication. It is given in a pill form, usually twice daily for the life of the cat. It works by blocking the secretion of thyroid hormone in the gland. This treatment only manages the diseases, it does not cure it. Some cats will experience side effects from the Tapazole ranging from lethargy and an itchy face to more severe side effects such as, vomiting, liver damage and bone marrow suppression. Frequent monitoring by your Banfield doctor is required.

Surgery: Surgery involves the removal of the affected thyroid gland, which can be an effective cure for this disease. It eliminates the need for daily administration of medications and your cat only has to be hospitalized for a couple of days. There are several significant risks with surgery that you should discuss with your Banfield doctor.

Hyperthyroidism is a potentially debilitating condition when left untreated, but this disease can usually be managed or even cured with treatment by your Banfield doctor. As always if you have any questions or concerns, please contact your Banfield hospital.



Emma and Buddy