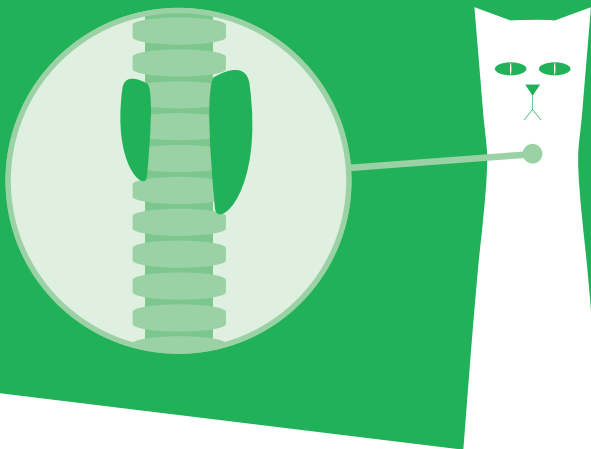


Hyperthyroidism



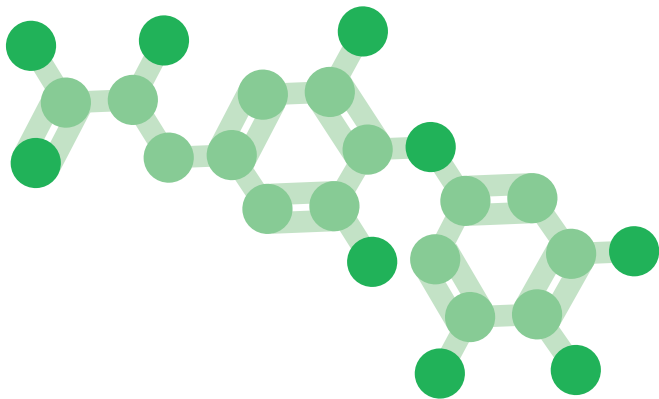
CATS PROTECTION
VETERINARY GUIDES



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 his 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 ten 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

Untreated hyperthyroidism will, in time, begin to affect other major organs such as the heart or 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 treated with medication, surgery or radiation.

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. 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 a 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 anaesthetic.

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
- 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 treatment, cats are injected with a 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 injections
- 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 exist where it can be done
- requires hospitalisation and complete isolation for about four weeks – the cat cannot be handled during this time due to the radiation levels in the body
- more expensive than medication or surgery

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 you and your cat.

What does the future hold?

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



This leaflet is one of a range provided by Cats Protection on issues surrounding cat care.

Cats Protection is the UK's leading feline welfare charity and helps more than 193,000 cats and kittens each year. We rely entirely on public generosity to finance this vital welfare work.

For more information on **adopting a cat**, **volunteering for us** or **making a donation**, visit **www.cats.org.uk**



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