

Signs, Symptoms and Diagnosis of Hyperthyroidism

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Clinical Picture of Feline Hyperthyroidism:

There are many clinical signs associated with feline hyperthyroidism. The hallmark sign is weight loss even though the appetite is excellent. The heart rate is usually elevated – normal is about 150 beats per minute. With the thyroid hormone being overproduced, the rate is often over 200 beats per minute.

In the normal cat, the lobes of the thyroid gland cannot be felt with one's fingers. In the hyperthyroid cat at least one lobe is usually prominent and may be detected by your veterinarian during a physical exam.

HYPERTHYROIDISM IS GENERALLY A DISEASE OF OLDER CATS. THE AVERAGE AGE AT DIAGNOSIS IS ABOUT 13.

How to Tell if a Cat is Hyperthyroid:

A blood panel is often ordered in the diagnostic work-up of any significant clinical signs. The blood panel surveys liver, kidney, red and white blood cells, and other body systems. Although there are multiple changes which fit hyperthyroidism, mild increases in liver enzymes are most commonly observed indicating mild (usually clinically insignificant) damage to the liver. The elevated T4 level forms the basis for diagnosis; there can be no other diagnosis in such a case.

What Causes Hyperthyroidism:

Hyperthyroidism is caused by a benign growth in the thyroid gland that is over-producing thyroid hormone. It is important to realize that these tumors are almost always benign and represent a form of goiter rather than a form of cancer.

Why is it so Important to Treat Hyperthyroid Cats?

Hyperthyroid cats frequently experience reduced quality of life through weight loss, muscle deterioration, chronic vomiting or chronic diarrhea. Not all cats experience these signs at the time of diagnosis but there are less visible reasons to treat: the thyroid hormone puts stress on the heart, as well as high blood pressure. These problems can result in heart failure, sudden blindness, or sudden death and all can be prevented with timely treatment for thyroid disease.

Treatment:

We start with a pill taken twice daily. The pills need to be taken daily or the symptoms will return. Surgical removal and radiation therapy are two permanent options. Occasional blood tests are required to assure your cat is on the proper dose.