

Hyperthyroidism in Cats

What is Hyperthyroidism?

Hyperthyroidism means your cat has an over-active thyroid gland(s) and they're producing too much thyroid hormone (T4). This happens when your cat's thyroid glands become enlarged. This is usually a benign process but occasionally cats can get cancer of the thyroid gland. One or both glands can be affected. The thyroid glands lie in your cats' neck on either side of their trachea (airway) and control their metabolic rate.

Hyperthyroidism is the most common hormone condition in older cats; the vast majority of cats diagnosed with hyperthyroidism will be over 10 years old.

You'll be pleased to know that almost all hyperthyroid cats can be treated very successfully.

What happens with an overactive thyroid?

The more thyroid hormone your cat produces, the more their metabolic rate will accelerate, therefore the more calories your cat will burn. That's why the typical symptoms include weight loss and restlessness.



How is hyperthyroidism diagnosed?

You may pick up on the symptoms yourself, like a deterioration in your cat's coat, ravenous appetite or excessive thirst. When you discuss this with your vet, they may suspect hyperthyroidism and suggest a blood test to measure your cat's T4 levels. They will also want to weigh your cat and assess its body condition score which will tell you whether your cat is underweight.

Hyperthyroidism symptoms you might spot

If you think your cat might have this condition, or you've had a diagnosis from your vet, you might notice the following symptoms:

- Losing weight despite a voracious appetite
- Over-eating (but occasionally a loss of appetite)
- Drinking and urinating more
- Vomiting
- Hyperactivity, restlessness, nervousness – sometimes irritability or aggression
- Deterioration in your cat's coat; may appear unkempt and matted
- Diarrhoea
- In severe cases, severe muscle loss or heart damage
- Getting out of breath too quickly

Treatments options for Hyperthyroidism

- Radio-iodine therapy:
 - Radio-iodine (or 'radioactive iodine') therapy is the gold-standard treatment for cats with hyperthyroidism. You can read our webpage detailing the full list of [advantages](#), but in summary it's your best chance of a low-risk, permanent cure for your cat. Unlike medication and diet, it's designed to be a one-off treatment, and unlike surgery it is non-invasive.
- Medication:
 - Medication won't cure your cat's hyperthyroidism, but may keep it under control by preventing the over-production of thyroid hormone. Tablets are usually to be given once or twice a day, or a gel applied to the ear-flap, for the rest of your cat's life.
- Surgery:
 - Hyperthyroidism can be cured with surgery and, if successful, no further medication is required.
 - This can be done as a unilateral or bilateral procedure.
 - However there is a risk of damage to the parathyroid gland, which is very close to the thyroid gland. Damaging this gland can cause calcium levels to plummet and require longterm

medication to maintain correct calcium levels.

- Low iodine diet:
 - There is now a special low-iodine cat food
 - However, this diet can only work if your cat will accept and eat this special food and eat nothing else. This can be hard to control in outdoor cats who may be fed elsewhere or may hunt.

Which feline hyperthyroidism treatment should you choose?

	Radio-iodine	Medication	Surgery	Diet
Will it cure your cat?	Almost certainly	No (just controlled)	Almost certainly	No (just controlled)
One off or lifetime treatment?	Mostly one off	Lifelong	May require 2 surgeries	No (just controlled)
Do you give the treatment?	No	Yes	No	Lifelong
Can the treatment be done at home?	No	Yes	No	Yes
Difficulty for owner	Initial care only	Medium	Initial care only	Yes
Is the treatment invasive?	Injection only	Tablets/gel	Yes	No
Can serious complications arise?	No	Yes	Yes	No (only food)
Will your cat need lifelong reviews?	No	Yes	No	Yes
Can hyperthyroidism reoccur?	1% reoccur after 3 years	Never goes away	Yes often need 2 surgeries	Never goes away
What are the costs?	Expensive but one off	Monthly costs	Expensive if multiple surgeries	Food can be costly



To book in for your cat in for a health check or testing, please call us on 01423 228080 or visit www.clarohillvets.co.uk.