

What is hyperthyroidism?

Hyperthyroidism is caused by an increase in production of thyroid hormones from the thyroid glands situated in the neck.

What causes hyperthyroidism?

In the majority of cases hyperthyroidism is caused by a benign change. Cats have two thyroid glands and in most cases, both glands are involved in the disease and become enlarged. Rarely, a malignant tumour can be the underlying cause.

What are the signs of hyperthyroidism?

Hyperthyroidism is mainly seen in cats over 7 years old. The main signs of hyperthyroidism are:

- ➔ Weight loss
- ➔ Increased activity, restlessness or irritability
- ➔ Increased appetite
- ➔ A poor and unkempt hair coat
- ➔ Increased thirst
- ➔ Increased heart rate

What are the complications associated with hyperthyroidism?

Uncontrolled hyperthyroidism can have important consequences on the heart, including increased heart rate and changes to the muscular wall of the heart leading to heart failure if untreated.

High blood pressure can also be a potential complication which can lead to damage to the eyes, kidneys, heart and brain.

Chronic kidney disease does not occur as a direct effect of hyperthyroidism, but they can occur together. Managing hyperthyroidism can sometimes have adverse effects on kidney function.

How is hyperthyroidism diagnosed?

A blood test is needed to measure the level of thyroid hormones in the blood.

How is hyperthyroidism treated?

There are four main options for treatment:

1. **Medical management**
Treatment is through once or twice daily administering of tablets which reduce the production and release of thyroid hormones. They do not provide a cure but they do allow short or long term control of hyperthyroidism. The treatment dose is adjusted to effect through the monitoring of thyroid hormones with regular blood tests.
2. **Surgical thyroidectomy**
Surgical removal of the affected gland/s can produce a permanent cure. However, occasionally signs of hyperthyroidism may develop later if previously unaffected tissue becomes diseased.
3. **Radioactive iodine therapy**
Radioactive iodine is a very safe and effective treatment for hyperthyroidism. It has the advantage of being curative in most cases with no ongoing treatment. The treatment is administered via a simple injection but, following treatment the cats are temporarily radioactive, and therefore have to be kept hospitalised for a short period of time. This treatment is only available at a small number of referral hospitals, Canterbury and RVC in Hertfordshire being the closest.
4. **Dietary treatment**
Some cats can be managed on a specially veterinary formulated diet which has a strictly controlled levels of iodine. Iodine is used by the thyroid gland to make thyroid hormones, if there is only sufficient iodine in the diet to make normal levels of these hormones, this can help control the disease. This diet must be fed exclusively and is only really suitable for 100% indoor cats.