So my cat has hyperthyroidism

What is hyperthyroidism?
Hyperthyroidism is an over secretion of thyroid hormones from the thyroid gland. In most cases it is caused by benign over-functioning growths of the thyroid gland. Malignant (cancerous) thyroid growths are rare. Hyperthyroidism is the most common endocrine disease of cats.

What are the clinical signs of hyperthyroidism?
Clinical signs can vary but the most noticeable signs are:
- Increased appetite yet weight loss.
- Increased urination and thirst.
- Increased energy level that is not appropriate for the age of the cat.
- Increased vocalization.
- Vomiting and/or diarrhea.
- Heart murmur and/or high blood pressure.
- Lethargy/depression late in the disease course.

How is hyperthyroidism diagnosed?
Hyperthyroidism will be detected as an elevated T4 hormone on a regular screening panel. Clinical signs can also help give a clue to hyperthyroidism but blood work is required to diagnose this disease.

What are the treatment options?
There are a variety of treatment options for hyperthyroidism and with good monitoring treatment is very successful.
- Methimazole-
  - Methimazole is a human drug that is used to inhibit thyroid hormone production.
  - The medication comes traditionally as a pill but can be made into a liquid or a transdermal cream (applied to the inside of the ear).
  - The medication is given twice a day for the rest of the cats life.
  - Side effects are rare but can occur.
- Radioactive Iodine (I-131)-
  - This radioactive isotope destroys the hyperfunctioning thyroid tissue while aiming to preserve the normal thyroid tissue.
  - A subcutaneous injection of this isotope is given at a specialty hyperthyroid clinic – we have three located in the Portland metro area. After the injection the cat must lodge at the facility for at least four days.
  - This is the best long-term treatment option as the goal is to produce a stable thyroid for the remainder of the cats life. It is essentially a “cure” for hyperthyroidism.
Occasionally this will result in a hypothyroid cat (meaning too low thyroid hormone) who will need daily thyroid supplement. This is rare.

Please ask us for a list of specialty clinics in the area that do this procedure!

- **Y/D diet**
  - This is a prescription diet that is iodine restricted. The thyroid gland needs iodine to produce thyroid hormone so the diet works to limit thyroid hormone production by limiting iodine.
  - The cat has to eat this exclusively- so indoor only cat with no treats.
  - This is not an appropriate diet for other cats- so only works in a single cat home.
  - May not work long term to maintain a stable thyroid hormone.

- **Surgery**
  - Removal of the thyroid gland.
  - Typically not recommend.

**What monitoring is required?**

The monitoring required depends on the type of treatment that is chosen to treat the hyperthyroidism.

- **Methimazole**
  - Blood work is required every six months to make sure the thyroid hormone is in the normal range.
  - Since hyperthyroidism is caused by a growth over time the amount of medication needed to control the disease may change.
  - After every dose adjustment blood work is required one month later to ensure the new dose is controlling the thyroid hormone.

- **I-131**
  - Blood work and blood pressure are typically required multiple times in the first nine months after treatment.

  - The specialty clinic will send home recommendations for when these tests should occur.

- **Y/D diet**
  - Blood work every six months to make sure the diet is still working.

**What if I don’t treat my cat for hyperthyroidism?**

If you decide not to treat your cat for hyperthyroidism the weight loss will continue. Effects may be seen on the heart with a possibility of congestive heart failure over time. Eventually most of these patients will stop eating and a quality of life decision will need to be made.

**I want to learn more about Hyperthyroidism!**

If you have any questions please do not hesitate to ask us! We are happy to discuss this disease and treatment options further! Additionally we have more in depth hand- outs if you would like.

**Sources**

- Clinical Veterinary Advisor Dogs and Cats 3<sup>rd</sup> edition 2015
- The Feline Patient 4<sup>th</sup> edition 2011

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