



LIESSE ANIMAL CLINIC

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Dr. R. J. Langill ~ Serving the community since 1950

FELINE HYPERTHYROIDISM

About hyperthyroidism

Hyperthyroidism is a condition in which the patient has an excess of thyroid hormone in the bloodstream. Hyperthyroidism occurs almost exclusively in cats (and people).

How is thyroid hormone produced and what does it do in the body?

Thyroid hormone is produced by the thyroid glands, which are two small glands located in the neck next to the Adams apple (larynx). In the healthy pet, thyroid hormone is secreted in the bloodstream in steady amounts, and it regulates the patient's metabolism. A deficiency of thyroid hormone (called hypothyroidism) can lead to a slow metabolism, while an overabundance of thyroid hormone (called hyperthyroidism) can lead to an overactive metabolism.

What are the symptoms of hyperthyroidism in the cat?

The symptoms of hyperthyroidism can vary from mild to severe and will vary from patient to patient. The "classic" symptoms of hyperthyroidism are restlessness and hyperactivity, increased appetite, weight loss, increased thirst, frequent urination, frequent stools, vomiting, irritable, poor grooming habits, and heart problems. Cats with hyperthyroidism will often show one or more of these signs. Rarely are all of these observed in one patient.

Which cats are more likely to get hyperthyroidism?

Hyperthyroidism most commonly occurs in cats over nine years of age.

What causes cats to get hyperthyroidism?

Hyperthyroidism is almost always caused by a benign hormone-secreting tumor of the thyroid glands. Rarely are thyroid tumors cancerous.

What effect does hyperthyroidism have on the heart?

Due to the prolonged stimulation of the heart by the increased levels of thyroid hormone, the cat's heart will thicken. This thickening of the heart muscles leads to smaller chambers within the heart and a loss of the heart's ability to pump blood effectively (a condition known as hypertrophic cardiomyopathy). This is a very serious and life-threatening condition. Fortunately, this heart problem will often reverse itself after the hyperthyroidism is controlled.

How is hyperthyroidism diagnosed?

We diagnose hyperthyroidism through a blood test. Often cats may have a tumor in the neck region that we can feel, making us very suspicious of the diagnosis.

How is hyperthyroidism treated?

The two main ways in which hyperthyroidism is treated are by (1) the medical approach and (2) the surgical approach. Through the medical approach we give the cat medication in tablet form, twice daily, to decrease the production of thyroid hormone from the thyroid gland. Through the surgical approach we surgically remove the thyroid tumor, and thyroid glands. Of these two approaches, the medical approach is favored as a first choice in most cases. The surgical approach is usually reserved for those cases in which the medical approach is not giving satisfactory results.