HYPERTHYROIDISM

VETERINARY SPECIALISTS OF NORTH TEXAS

WHAT IS HYPERTHYROIDISM?

Hyperthyroidism results from an overproduction of thyroid hormone (thyroxine) from the thyroid gland and is one of the most common endocrine diseases affecting older cats. Dogs may also develop hyperthyroidism, but not as often.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF HYPERTHYROIDISM?

Some of the more common symptoms of hyperthyroidism are weight loss, increased thirst, increased urination, and restlessness. Initially the appetite is increased, even ravenous, but a decline in appetite can also be noted. Other signs often seen are diarrhea, unkempt haircoat, vomiting, and panting.

HOW IS HYPERTHYROIDISM DIAGNOSED?

The diagnosis of hyperthyroidism is typically a blood test which measures the level of thyroxine (T4) in the body. If your veterinarian suspects that hyperthyroidism is still a potential diagnosis despite a normal T4 level, there are other types of more specialized T4 blood testing that can be done.

Another potential diagnostic tool is a nuclear scan. They are very accurate, and safe.

HOW IS HYPERTHYROIDISM TREATED?

There are 3 main ways to treat hyperthyroidism each with advantages and disadvantages. You and your veterinarian will decide which is best for you and your cat.

Medical therapy:
The most common oral medication used to treat hyperthyroidism is a drug called Methimazole. This drug works by blocking the iodine that the thyroid glands need to make the thyroxine hormone.

Surgery:
Depending on your cat's health, surgical removal of the affected thyroid lobe(s) may be recommended. This can be a curative procedure if it is done well and your cat is a good candidate for it. This is the most common way dogs with hyperthyroidism is treated.

Radioactive Iodine:
An injection of the radioactive iodine (I-131) is given. It becomes concentrated in the overactive thyroid tissue and emits radiation to the surrounding hyperactive tissue thereby destroying it.

External beam radiation therapy:
Dogs with hyperthyroidism often need surgery, and may need to follow up with external beam radiation (not radioactive iodine).

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