

Hyperthyroidism



Early detection of hyperthyroidism could give your pet a longer, healthier, happier life.





What is **hyperthyroidism**?



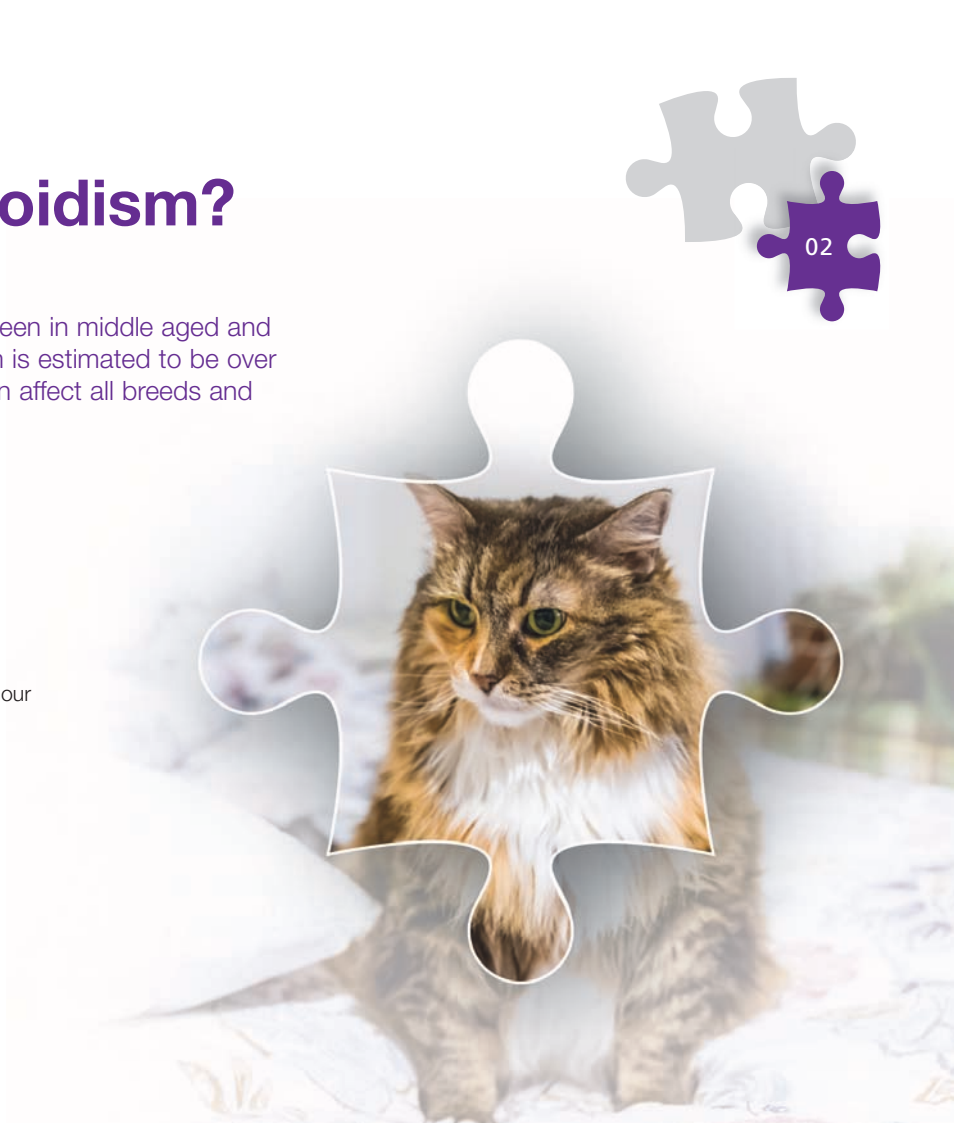
Hyperthyroidism is a condition commonly seen in middle aged and older cats. The prevalence of hyperthyroidism is estimated to be over 6% in cats older than nine years of age. It can affect all breeds and both sexes equally.

It is caused by an excessive production of thyroid hormones from the thyroid gland in the neck (although it can occasionally come from thyroid tissue found elsewhere in the body). The thyroid hormones regulate the metabolism, so an overproduction of these hormone increases metabolic rate and can have effects on all the body's major organ systems.

The thyroid enlargement is normally due to a benign tumour (a tumour that is unlikely to spread), so many cats with hyperthyroidism can have a good quality of life for years, following diagnosis and treatment.

Speak to your vet if you have any concerns.

Uncover the signs of hyperthyroidism





How to spot the **signs** and **symptoms**

Signs of hyperthyroidism vary, as every cat has an individual response to the change in hormones.



- Typically cats will show **weight loss** despite being continuously hungry.
- **Vomiting and diarrhoea** may occur.
- Many cats will appear **overactive or irritable**. Hyperactivity can make a cat seem younger than their years would suggest, which can give a false impression that the cat is well.
- Affected cats may **drink and urinate more**.
- Some cats develop an **unkempt and scurfy coat**.
- It may become noticeable that your cat has a **rapid heartbeat**, and the vet may detect a heart murmur.
- The vet may also detect an **increase in blood pressure**.

Occasionally affected cats will appear weak, lack energy and have a poor appetite, but this is not a typical form of the condition.

How is hyperthyroidism **diagnosed?**



Your vet will take a thorough history and perform a full clinical examination. If hyperthyroidism is suspected, a number of tests will be required to confirm the diagnosis and rule out other possible conditions.

Blood tests

These will look at levels of thyroid hormones, but also assess the health of the internal organs, such as the kidneys. Thyroid hormone levels can vary over time so it may be necessary to repeat or run additional blood tests to confirm the diagnosis.

Urine sample

This will assess the function of the kidneys and rule out other problems such as diabetes.

Blood pressure measurement

Many hyperthyroid cats have high blood pressure.

Electrocardiogram (ECG)

An ECG may be carried out to provide an electrical trace of heart activity.

Ultrasound and X-ray

The heart may appear enlarged, as some hyperthyroid cats can develop a thickening of the heart muscle called hypertrophic cardiomyopathy (HCM). Approximately 50% of hyperthyroid cats may have a heart murmur present when they are first diagnosed but not all of them will have HCM.





How is hyperthyroidism **treated?**

Hyperthyroidism is readily treatable and there are currently four main treatment options. A patient will normally be stabilised on medication or diet first before the other options are considered.

Medication

Anti-thyroid drugs can be given daily, in either liquid or tablet form, to reduce the production and release of thyroid hormone from the thyroid gland. These are either used to stabilise the condition for the rest of the cat's life or, in the short term, to control the signs and reduce the risk of complications before surgical or radioactive treatment (see below). If you choose to treat your cat with daily medication for life, your vet will ask you to come in for regular check-ups and blood tests to monitor the response to treatment, adjust the dose if needed and identify any other problems. This is likely to be three weeks after starting the medication or any dose change.

Will this cure the condition?

No. Daily medication is required.

Possible side effects

Side effects are uncommon but possible, including white blood cell suppression, itchy skin and liver changes. These should be discussed with your vet.

Disadvantages

Daily or twice daily tableting, or daily oral (liquid) solution, plus regular check-ups and blood tests are needed.

Surgical thyroidectomy

An operation can be performed to remove the enlarged thyroid gland, and this treatment usually leads to a permanent cure. Sometimes a second surgery to remove the other gland is needed later in life.

Will this cure the condition?

Yes (in the majority of cases, but it may not be effective if there is additional thyroid tissue elsewhere in the body).

Possible side effects

Calcium control can become a problem, which may require medication.

Disadvantages

There are some risks involved with general anaesthetic and surgery, which your vet will discuss with you.





Radioactive Iodine therapy

This has the advantage of a high cure rate (95-99% of cases), without the need for anaesthetic, and can treat cats with thyroid tissue which is not situated in the normal position of the neck. Carried out by a referral veterinary hospital, a single injection is required and works by selectively destroying the excess thyroid tissue and therefore reducing hormone levels. However, a treated cat will remain radioactive for a period of time following the injection and must therefore stay in hospital for one to two weeks following treatment.

Life expectancy has been shown to be better with this treatment than medication.

Will this cure the condition?

Yes.

Possible side effects

Minimal.

Disadvantages

The initial cost is greater than alternative treatments, with a stay in hospital and, very occasionally, a second injection may be needed.

Iodine restricted prescription diet

A special diet that has been developed to limit your cat's iodine intake, which may be suitable in some cases. It is also formulated to support the heart and kidneys. No other food, titbits or treats can be fed as this will negate the beneficial effect of the diet, so it is most suitable for indoor cats.

Will this cure the condition?

No. It will be a lifelong diet.

Possible side effects

Minimal.

Disadvantages

Indoor cats only and not ideal for fussy eaters.

For cats **under 12 years** of age the recommendation would usually be surgery or radio-active iodine.

For cats **over 15 years** of age, diet or medication is usually recommended.

For most cats diagnosed with hyperthyroidism the condition can be managed to allow them a good quality of life for several years, and is potentially curable.

Please discuss any concerns you have with your vet so that a treatment plan can be arranged to suit both you and your pet.

