

# Ask A Vet: Old Hyper Cat Needs Help

*Sunday, June 7, 2015*

Dear Dr. Weldy's,

I have an 18 year old cat that is eating a lot of food, drinking a lot of water, losing weight, and seems hyperactive. I was talking to a friend that has a cat with hyperthyroidism, and said her cat acted the same way. What is hyperthyroidism, and could it be that?

Dear Cat-Owner,

It is important to have your cat examined by a veterinarian to make the true diagnosis, as things like kidney disease, diabetes, or even cancer could be causing these signs. But with what you're describing, it could be hyperthyroidism. Hyperthyroidism is a condition caused by a benign, but functional tumor on the thyroid gland. Thyroid hormone has many functions in the body, but what we are often concerned with is the increasing of the metabolic rate. Excess thyroid hormone causes increased blood flow to most areas of the body leading to higher consumption of calories, even to the point of using up any fat within the body, and breaking down muscles for energy. While this might not sound terrible at first, this increased consumption of nutrients and a higher metabolic rate can have a damaging effect on the heart. Heart murmurs, thickening of the heart muscle (hypertrophic cardiomyopathy), and congestive heart failure can all occur if this condition is left untreated.

Diagnosis of hyperthyroidism is made with a blood test. Frequently, veterinarians will check kidney, liver, and heart functions in conjunction to make sure there are not other underlying issues. Treatment of hyperthyroidism can be accomplished mainly in one of two ways. First (the most common), is the use of a medication called Methimazole. It is a drug designed to damage the thyroid gland to slow the production of thyroid hormone. This medication needs to be given daily for the rest of the cat's life to maintain a normal level of thyroid hormone. This can be given in oral pill form or a gel that is placed into the cat's ear. Regular monitoring of the thyroid level is needed to make sure that the dose of methimazole is not too high or low. The other major treatment method is injecting radioactive iodine into your cat. Iodine is selectively absorbed by the thyroid gland and the radioactive nature of this compound destroys the gland permanently. This has a major advantage in that no pills or gel needs to be given to the cat ever. The major disadvantage to this is the cost. However, it can save quite a bit of time and money from purchasing the medications and paying for rechecking thyroid levels 2-4 times per year. Two other options for treatment are restricting iodine in the diet, or surgically removing the thyroid gland.

Hopefully, this answered most of your questions regarding hyperthyroidism in cats. It is important to have your veterinarian examine your cat and evaluate the thyroid level to make an accurate diagnosis.

-Dr. Jason Heitzman