

Hyperthyroidism in Cats

What You Need to Know

What Is Hyperthyroidism?

Hyperthyroidism is a common condition in older cats caused by benign (non-cancerous) growth in the thyroid glands. These glands, located in the neck, produce thyroxine (T4), a hormone that regulates metabolism. When too much T4 is produced, it can affect many organs—especially the heart, liver, and kidneys.

Common Signs of Hyperthyroidism

- Weight loss
- Increased appetite
- Vomiting or diarrhea
- Increased thirst and urination
- Restlessness or increased activity
- Changes in coat or shedding
- Vocalizing more than usual
- Agitation or panting

Some cats may show opposite signs, such as lethargy and poor appetite.

During a physical exam, your vet may detect an increased heart rate, irregular rhythm, or an enlarged thyroid gland. Diagnosis is typically confirmed with a blood test showing elevated levels of T4. Most cats are diagnosed around age 12, and but both males and females can be affected.

Treatment Options

Hyperthyroidism is a serious but treatable condition. There are three main options:

1. Medication (Methimazole)

Pros:

- No hospitalization needed
- Lower upfront cost
- No risk of hypothyroidism or calcium imbalance

Cons:

- Long-term costs add up (medication + regular bloodwork)
- Must be given orally or topically twice daily
- Not a cure—lifelong treatment required
- Possible side effects (vomiting, lethargy, liver issues, etc.)
- About 25% of cats experience side effects



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2. Surgery (Thyroidectomy)

Pros:

- Often curative
- Quick correction of hormone levels

Cons:

- Requires anesthesia and hospitalization
- Higher risk in older cats with heart or kidney issues
- Potential complications (nerve damage, calcium imbalance)
- Complex procedure

3. Radioactive Iodine Therapy (I-131)

Pros:

- Highest cure rate (95–98%)
- One-time treatment, no anesthesia
- Minimal side effects
- Usually, no ongoing medication needed

Cons:

- Higher upfront cost
- Requires 4-day hospital stay (no visits allowed)
- Temporary radiation precautions at home
- Not suitable for cats with poor litterbox habits

Bottom Line: Radioiodine therapy is considered the gold standard. It offers a high cure rate with minimal long-term care. While the short separation may be tough, the long-term benefits are worth it.

Preparing for Treatment

Your vet will guide you through the prep steps. Blood and urine tests should be done within 1–3 months before treatment. If your cat is on Methimazole, **do not stop the medication** until we give you a specific date—usually a 2-week break is needed before therapy.

If your cat has other health issues or is on daily medication, please share their medication schedule so we can continue treatment during their stay.

Hospital Stay Details

By law, your cat must stay until radiation levels are safe—typically 4 days. Our treatment room is quiet and comfortable. You may bring toys or blankets, but they won't be returned due to safety regulations. We recommend sending your cat's favorite food to help them feel at home.

Our team will check on your cat at least twice daily and provide updates via phone or email. While visits aren't allowed, rest assured your cat is in good hands.



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Post-Treatment Care: What to Expect at Home

After your cat returns home, a small amount of residual radiation will remain in the thyroid gland. To keep everyone safe, we'll provide clear, easy-to-follow instructions for the first **10 days** after discharge.

Safety Guidelines

- **Keep your cat indoors** to prevent environmental contamination.
- **Limit close contact** (e.g., cuddling or sleeping together).
- **Children under 12, pregnant individuals and individuals with compromised immune** systems should avoid contact during this period.
- **Handle litter with care**—we'll show you how.

These precautions are temporary and designed to protect your household. The radiation your cat emits is minimal—less than what you'd receive from a dental X-ray, a beach day, or a long flight. If you're uncomfortable with home care, **boarding options are available**.

Follow-Up Care

Schedule check-ups with your regular veterinarian at:

- **1 month** post-treatment
- **3 months** post-treatment

These visits help monitor thyroid hormone (T4) levels and ensure your cat recovers well.



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Possible Complications

Hypothyroidism (Low Thyroid Levels)

It occurs in fewer than **3% of treated cats**, usually those on medication before therapy or with extensive thyroid involvement. Symptoms include:

- Weight gain
- Lethargy
- Poor coat condition

If needed, your cat can take a daily thyroid supplement. It's well tolerated, affordable, and requires minimal monitoring.

Recurrence of Hyperthyroidism

Rare (about **0.5%** of cases), usually seen **3+ years** after initial treatment. If T4 levels don't normalize within 90 days, we will repeat treatment for your cat **at no extra hospitalization cost**—you'll only pay for the medication.

If you have any questions or concerns about radioiodine therapy, please don't hesitate to contact us. We're here to help you and your cat every step of the way.

