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Paddington Cat Hospital

Melissa graduated from the University of Sydney in 1990. She worked in a private small animal practice in Adelaide for two years and then in England for a further two years. Melissa continued in private practice on her return to Sydney before starting Paddington Cat Hospital with her husband, Randolph Baral, in 1997. Melissa is interested in all aspects of feline medicine and has a particular liking for soft tissue surgery. Of course, Melissa was nominatively destined for feline medicine.

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Diagnosis is usually straightforward with blood tests, particularly testing for T4, but sometimes (especially if there

are any other medical conditions present) it can be more complicated. We strongly recommend having full blood and urine tests done, so we have as much information as possible at our disposal.

Luckily this is one of the better diseases for an older cat to have, as we have pretty good success with treatment! There are three main treatment options- medical, surgical and radio-active iodine treatment, or a combination of these. Each of these has its benefits and disadvantages, and needs to be discussed for the individual cat. Medical treatment is usually done at least initially, so we can get the disease under control quickly and reversibly. It is recommended to have a recheck within a month of starting treatment, to assess response and recheck the blood values of the thyroid and also the kidneys. Often a high level of thyroid hormone can suppress the blood values we use to look at kidney function, so it's not until we get the T4 normal that we really know how well the kidneys are working. This is an important factor, as kidney disease is also a very common disease in older cats and will have an impact on the long-term treatment decisions. At this recheck appointment, a conversation is usually had about the different treatments and which is the best long-term option in your particular case. Medical treatment is usually a twice daily tablet, and gives flexibility and tends to be affordable over time, but the occasional cat doesn't tolerate it well (or can be difficult to medicate!), and it requires regular checks. The paste version (which is rubbed into the ears) is often easier, but is more expensive. Surgery is a very good option if only one of the thyroid glands is affected, but there is always the chance the other thyroid gland may become affected in time. Radio-active iodine treatment is the gold standard in terms of permanent options, but it is vital to ensure good kidney function before taking this step. It also requires a period of hospitalisation, and is usually done through a specialised facility.

Unfortunately, at this time we don't really know what causes hyperthyroidism, so we can't really give any good advice about how to avoid the disease in future. Interestingly, it was only first recognised in the 1970s- although perhaps a big part of this is the fact that cats are now tending to live longer and get better medical care, rather than just appearing suddenly out of the blue. Regardless, the disease is a 'good' diagnosis, in that we usually get excellent response to treatment, and puss can go back to the happy healthy cat he was before!

THYROID DISEASE IN CATS

Most of us have heard of the thyroid gland and may even know someone who has suffered from thyroid disease, but few people have any idea of its function. As Hyperthyroidism (an 'overactive thyroid') is one of the most common diseases we see in older cats, I thought I would give an overview of this condition. As a by-the-by, people can get both HYPERthyroidism (overactive thyroid disease) or HYPOthyroidism (underactive thyroid disease), and dogs tend to get hypothyroidism. We very rarely see underactive thyroid disease in cats.

Cats have two thyroid glands, located in the neck, and normally they are so small we can't feel them. Their primary function is to produce thyroid hormone, which has effects all over the body to increase metabolism. Every cell in the body is affected by this hormone. The gland actually produces an inactive form of the hormone, called T4, which is converted to the active T3 form within the organs. As cats get older, one or both gland may enlarge, and in most cases excessive amounts of the hormone is produced. The vast majority of enlarged thyroid glands are benign in nature; only in a very small number of cases is the growth a malignant one. So mostly, we are concerned with the effects of the increase in hormone, rather than the growth itself.

Due to its function to increase metabolism, most of the clinical signs we see with hyperthyroidism relate to this- the hallmark signs are weight loss coupled with a good to increased appetite. We may also see gastro-intestinal signs like vomiting or loose motions, or excessive drinking and urinating. When we examine puss at the vets, there is usually weight loss, an enlargement of one or both thyroid gland, and increased heart rate with a murmur (as the hormone has a direct effect on the heart). Sometimes we see things like high blood pressure, or a change in the hair coat. Often the client remarks that their cat is acting like a kitten, and has finally lost the weight they have been trying to lose for years!!