

## Treatment of Feline Hyperthyroidism

There are currently three alternatives to treating hyperthyroidism:

- Radioactive iodine (I131) therapy
- Medication (pills or transdermal ear gel)
- Surgery

For more information, please visit [www.felineoutreach.org](http://www.felineoutreach.org).



Feline Outreach Inc. is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to the promotion of the care of companion animals, specifically cats.

The information contained is for general informational purposes only, and is no substitute for your own research or the advice of a veterinarian.

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# *Kitty in Hyperdrive*



## Treatment of feline hyperthyroidism





## Symptoms

Symptoms of hyperthyroidism can vary, but may include vomiting, fast heartbeat, excessive fur licking/pulling, ravenous appetite, weight loss, yowling, excessive drinking, or excessive urination. In some cases, there may be no overt symptoms and diagnosis is made as part of a wellness exam.

When hyperthyroidism is present, the cat's metabolism is in overdrive and burning calories at a fast rate. Left untreated, hyperthyroidism can cause heart failure.

## Diagnosis

Unfortunately, hyperthyroidism is often not diagnosed until later stages – when the cat is very thin and has a poor coat.

Hyperthyroidism is often diagnosed with a blood test. A “total T4” or simply “T4” can be diagnostic. Care must be taken in evaluating T4 levels, as the reference range used by labs includes young healthy cats.

For cats over 10 years of age, T4 levels should be in the lower half of the range, and they should decrease over time. T4 levels in the upper half of the range, or increasing over time should be regarded with suspicion. The “free T4” blood test can also be useful in diagnosis.

In some cases, total T4 and free T4 are in normal range or inconclusive. A technetium or scintigraphic scan by a specialist can provide absolute diagnosis.

## Treatment

There are three options for treatment. Radioactive iodine (I131) therapy involves a one-time injection or pill given by a specialist. Quarantine is required for five to seven days. Then the cat returns home and the caregiver follows a few safety protocols for a few weeks. This treatment is generally pricey, but basically a one-time expense. Cost can vary widely by center. A technetium (or scintigraphic) scan ensures the most accuracy in dosing, but is not available at all centers.

Another option, methimazole (brand name Tapazole), is a pill or transdermal gel applied to the ear once or twice daily. It can cause stomach upset. Sometimes starting with a lower dose and gradually increasing it can alleviate the nausea. In rarer cases, more serious side effects can occur. Medication requires frequent bloodwork to check the dose. In the long run, it may be more expensive than radioactive iodine.

The third option is surgery. Surgery can result in over or under-treatment, which necessitates a second surgery or medication to correct the condition.

## Finally

Cats diagnosed with hyperthyroidism can have great quantity and quality of life if treated. Blood tests should be performed routinely on older cats, and scrutinized not only in relation to reference ranges but also trends from prior bloodwork. Technitium scans should be considered for any cat showing symptoms to ensure proper diagnosis.

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