

My Cat Won't Take Medicine for Hyperthyroidism

CatChannel veterinary expert Arnold Plotnick, DVM, suggests some alternative forms of medication.

By Arnold Plotnick, DVM

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Q: I have a 14-year-old cat who has been diagnosed with hyperthyroidism. However; she can't keep her pill down and won't allow me to put a drop in her ear. Is there a natural (homemade remedy) for her problem?

A: Hyperthyroidism is the most common glandular disorder of cats. Typically, it is seen in older cats.

Hyperthyroidism can be managed medically with a drug called methimazole. The drug comes in tablet form; however, it can be prepared in liquid form by a compounding pharmacy, as well as a gel that can be smeared on the inside of the ear. Some cats do experience gastrointestinal upset when given the pill. In these cases, you should at least give the liquid form a try. Many cats that experience GI upset from the pill will be able to handle the medication if it is liquefied. Compounding pharmacies can add flavor to the liquid, such as tuna or chicken, making it more palatable. The liquid can be squirted directly into the cat's mouth, or onto the food.

For cats that cannot handle any oral form of the drug, a gel form of the drug can be smeared on the inside of the ear. Most cats will let you rub this ointment on the ear. I'm surprised that your cat won't let you do this.

The best option for treatment, however, is radioactive iodine treatment. Your cat can be given an injection of radioactive iodine under the skin. The iodine travels through the bloodstream to the overactive thyroid gland and fixes the problem. The advantage is that it is curative. The disadvantage is that it is a bit pricey (approximately \$1,400 - \$1,800), and the cat has to stay at the veterinary facility for a few days until the radioactivity level of the urine and feces have decreased to an acceptable level. You may have to consider this option if your cat won't tolerate any form of the medication.

I do not know of any natural remedies for hyperthyroidism, and I would be highly skeptical of any natural product that claims to treat hyperthyroidism.

If you insist on trying a natural remedy, however, you need to confirm the efficacy of the drug by checking your cat's thyroid hormone level after using the remedy for two weeks. If the thyroid hormone level has not returned to the normal range, then the so-called remedy is not working, regardless of what the label claims. Do not use your own subjective assessment of your cat's clinical signs to assess the efficacy. If a product claims to treat hyperthyroidism, then the thyroid hormone level will return to normal once you start giving the medication.