

FAQ's Radioactive Iodine Therapy (I-131) For Treatment of Hyperthyroidism in Cats

Why Radioactive Iodine (I-131) Therapy?

The state-of-the-art hyperthyroid treatment used in human medicine is also available for cats. This therapy is both highly effective and easy for cats because it:

- cures 96% of all cases with a single treatment
- requires only one subcutaneous injection (e. g. under the skin, like a vaccine)
- requires no anesthesia
- is safe for both older and younger cats
- avoids surgery
- usually avoids the need for your cat to take life-long drugs



How does it work? The cat's thyroid gland uses iodine to produce necessary hormones. Radioiodine I-131 is a radioactive form of iodine. Hyperactive thyroid cells absorb I-131, as it naturally decays it emits beta and gamma radiation which kills the overactive thyroid cells. As abnormal cells die, excess hormone production stops and your cat becomes euthyroid (normal) again.

How do I schedule I-131 Therapy? Your family veterinarian will consult with Dr. Hazel Carney and will provide your cat's health records to WestVet. After this discussion, you may schedule an appointment at WestVet where Dr. Carney will perform a thorough physical examination of your cat in order to determine whether special medications or other tests are needed, as well as answer your questions. She will determine your cat's treatment date and schedule an appointment for therapy. Due to Idaho regulations, I-131 therapy takes place at *Four Rivers Veterinary Clinic* in Ontario, Oregon. We will provide a map for you and basic directions to the clinic.

What will my cat's stay be like? The morning of the therapy, you will drop off your cat at Four Rivers Veterinary Clinic. Bring something that "smells like home" to put in your cat's cage. (Be sure it is disposable, due to safety regulations, the item cannot be returned.)

Dr. Carney will oversee the care of your cat throughout its stay. While staying in the radiation therapy ward, your cat will eat its usual diet and technicians will provide any needed medications, and monitor radioactivity levels. Staff will also give all the TLC they safely can to your pet. You will receive a daily update phone call.

Rest assured, no dogs are close by to irritate your cat; most cats are truly relaxed during their stay. Your pet will enjoy warm, cozy, clean cages and quiet music. You may also provide special music or tapes of your voice for your cat.

Please note, Oregon will not allow you to visit your cat while it remains in the isolation facility. Once your cat's level of radiation is at or below the release limit set by the state of Oregon, your cat may return home. The minimum stay is 4 days, average stay ranges from 4 to 7 days.

What are the dangers of radioactive iodine treatment? If lots of hyperactive thyroid cells die and release the stored thyroxin, the cat's already fast-running systems will go even faster. A slight risk exists of a significant abnormal heart rhythm or an increase in blood pressure for 2 to 3 days following treatment. However, administering a heart-protective medication before treatment decreases that risk. To be proactive, Dr. Carney will prescribe the drug and she and the staff will closely monitor your cat to decrease the risk of serious reactions.

Occasionally a cat has a sore throat or hoarse voice for 7 to 10 days after treatment. In rare instances, the iodine will kill all thyroid cells and the cat will need oral thyroid hormone supplementation.

What after care will my cat need? After treatment your cat will have a very low amount of radiation in its body—about 50 times **less** than you would have if you were treated with I-131, or as little as you would receive if you flew across the country in a plane.

Because of this radiation, the Department of Radiation Safety of Oregon requires the following:

- Your cat must ride home in a carrier.
- For the first 2 weeks use rubber gloves when cleaning the litter box.
- Use flushable litter, dispose of your cat's waste in the toilet, not the garbage. For 2-4 weeks following treatment, your cat will excrete unabsorbed I-131 and radioactive waste products in its urine and stool. If your septic system won't handle flushable litter we have instructions to allow safe storage and disposal.
- Pregnant women and people receiving chemotherapy should not clean the cat's litter box or medicate the cat.
- Closely snuggle with your cat only about an hour a day.
- By law your cat must either stay at home with you or be boarded at Four Rivers Veterinary Clinic for these 2 weeks.
- We recommend that you have Dr. Carney or your family veterinarian re-examine your cat at 4- and 12- weeks posttreatment.

Will the disease recur?

We do not know the cause of hyperthyroidism so reoccurrence is possible.

If your cat has a thyroid tumor in only one side of its neck, the other thyroid gland may develop the disease at some time in the future. This occurs in 5 – 30% of cats within 6 to 36 months after the initial treatment.

What are treatment costs?

The cost of treatment while your cat is in the treatment center is \$1250-\$1500 for the 4-7 days. Other costs vary with the examinations and lab tests that your cat needs.

Who will take care of my cat? Dr. Hazel C. Carney, a Board Certified Specialist in Veterinary Practice with an MS in Veterinary Physiology, has more than 25 years of experience in feline medicine. She has been treating hyperthyroid cats with I-131 since 1986 and has received advanced training in the diagnosis and treatment of the disease. She is dedicated to helping each cat under her care happily thrive.

If you have any other questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact WestVet (208)375-1600.

Long-Term Survival Post I-131 Therapy

