



A Patient's Guide to Radioiodine Therapy

Common Questions and Answers About Radioiodine Therapy

Your doctor has advised you to receive Radioactive Iodine I-131 (radioiodine) treatment for your overactive thyroid or thyroid carcinoma. Radioiodine therapy is simple, safe, and very easy to take. You simply swallow it. The practice of treating one's thyroid with radioiodine has been used medically for over 40 years.

This page has been prepared for patients who are scheduled for thyroid treatment with radioiodine. Listed on this page are the most frequently asked questions or concerns surrounding the procedure. It also includes some special instructions and guidelines to follow during and after your treatment.

Who is the best source of information concerning my condition and treatment?

Your doctor is the best source of information concerning your condition and treatment. This booklet has been developed to help answer some of the most frequently asked questions or concerns regarding radioiodine treatment. You should use this booklet as a guideline in discussing your particular situation with your doctor.

What is hyperthyroidism?

Hyperthyroidism results when your thyroid gland produces too much thyroid hormone. Thyroid hormone controls your body's activity level. If too much hormone is present, you may be experiencing a number of symptoms such as weight loss, nervousness, or feeling hot. Also, you may be having some difficulty sleeping or you may be having trouble concentrating.

How can it be treated?

Hyperthyroidism can be treated with radioiodine, by medication to help control thyroid activity, or by surgery to remove part or all of your gland. You and your doctor will decide which method is best for your particular situation.

Will Radioiodine treatment give me cancer?

There is no conclusive evidence that radioiodine treatment of the thyroid can cause cancer.

What is radioiodine and how long does it work?

Iodine is a natural substance your thyroid gland uses to make thyroid hormone. One form of iodine, called Iodine I-131, is radioactive and can be used to treat various conditions of the thyroid gland. This radioiodine is collected by your thyroid gland decreasing its function

which inhibits its inability to grow.

How long does it take to notice results after taking radioiodine?

By one month there should be noticeable improvement in your symptoms and by three months, the radioiodine therapy should have had its full effect on your thyroid. Occasionally the radioiodine therapy needs to be given again.

Is radioiodine treatment safe?

Treatment with radioiodine is a well established nuclear medicine procedure that is considered by the medical community and the Food and Drug Administration as a safe and effective method for treating patients with hyperthyroidism.

How long does the radioactivity stay in my body?

The radioiodine that is not taken up by your thyroid gland is eliminated from your body usually in about two days. Radioiodine leaves your body primarily in your urine, but some may also be eliminated in your saliva, sweat, and feces. The radioiodine that is taken up by your thyroid gland is responsible for your specific treatment. This amount decreases quickly over time which reduces the exposure to both you and to others around you.

How long should I wait after treatment before attempting to get pregnant?

An unborn child's thyroid gland can be harmed by radioiodine, so before you attempt to get pregnant, you should discuss your situation with your doctor.

Are there any side effects from the radioactivity?

As with most medical therapies, there are side effects associated with radioiodine therapy. Most of the radioactivity from the radioiodine treatment will be received by your thyroid gland. However, some of the radioactivity will go to other parts of the body. The exposure from this radioactivity is minimal, but the following are common side effects from treatment:

- *Occasionally, the salivary glands enlarge and you may have a sore throat which can be treated with aspirin.*
- *Some people may experience nausea immediately after administration of the treatment. This usually passes quickly.*
- *People with bulging eyeballs (exophthalmos) because of their thyroid condition could have some worsening. This is rare. Most people's eye problems improve or remain the same.*
- *Although care is taken to give a dose to cure your specific disease, occasionally your original symptoms may return, necessitating additional doses of radioiodine to help control your disease.*
- *Occasionally you can become hypothyroid. This is the opposite of hyperthyroidism, meaning your thyroid gland is no longer producing adequate amounts of thyroid hormone.*

Are others at risk from the radioactivity?

Because the dose of radioiodine for treating most thyroid disorders is relatively small, people around you are at low risk. Your doctor will discuss your particular situation and the risk involved to you and others around you. In order to help minimize any unnecessary radiation exposure to others, it is important to follow these basic guidelines during the first few days after your treatment:

- *The greater distance you are from others the less radiation they will receive.*
- *Radiation exposure to others is directly proportional to the amount of time they remain within a close distance to you after a treatment.*
- *For approximately 7 days after your treatment, flush the toilet two or three times after using the bathroom.*

- *Wash your hands thoroughly and routinely.*
- *Use separate towels and eating utensils and wash them separately for 4-7 days.*
- *Children and pregnant women should avoid close contact (no closer than two feet) for long periods of time for 4-7 days after your treatment.*
- *You should sleep in a separate bed for 4-7 days. During this period you should avoid kissing and sexual contact of any kind.*
- *Drink plenty of fluids to help flush any extra radioiodine from your body.*
- *If you think you are pregnant, please inform your physician because radioiodine treatment should not be given to pregnant women in most cases.*
- *Radioiodine is secreted in breast milk. Therefore, if you are breast-feeding, you will have to stop. You should discuss with your doctor when it will be safe for you to resume breast-feeding.*