


# Radioiodine Thyrotoxicosis Therapy

Nuclear Medicine Service  
Information for Patients



Please read this leaflet carefully.  
It contains important information and instructions.

University Hospitals of Leicester   
NHS Trust

## Introduction

We have been asked by your consultant to perform

### Thyrotoxicosis therapy

This leaflet tells you about:

- what will happen at the hospital
- what you need to do before and after the treatment

## What is thyrotoxicosis therapy?

You have a condition called thyrotoxicosis. This means that your thyroid gland is overactive. A radioactive form of iodine (called radioiodine) is used as an effective treatment for thyrotoxicosis.

The radioiodine is in a capsule similar in size to a paracetamol which you swallow with water. The radioactivity kills some of your thyroid cells and reduces the over-activity of the thyroid gland.

Please read this booklet carefully. It provides you with important information about the procedure.

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## Important information

- Children and babies are particularly sensitive to radiation. We need to be sure you are **not** pregnant. If there is any possibility that you may be pregnant, please inform your consultant.
- If you are breastfeeding, you should stop 8 weeks before treatment and not start again with that child after the treatment. Please discuss this with your consultant.
- If you are taking carbimazole or propylthiouracil, then you will need to stop taking this drug shortly before treatment. Your consultant will advise you about this.
- If you need an ambulance, please let us know in advance by calling **0116 258 5627**

### For three weeks before the treatment:

- Please **do not** take cough medicines, multivitamins or cod liver oil.

### For two weeks before the treatment, try to eat a low iodine diet:

- Please **do not** eat sea salt or iodised salt, fish and other sea food as these are all high in iodine content.
- Avoid foods that are artificially coloured pink or red such as glace cherries, canned strawberries, spam, salami, certain pastries and sweets; the colouring material E127 is rich in iodine.
- Try to cut down on dairy produce such as eggs, cheese, milk and milk products, as they all contain some iodine.

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## The treatment

You will be given a radioiodine capsule (similar in size to a paracetamol) to swallow with a drink of water. It is important that you let us know in advance if you have difficulty swallowing capsules.

- Please do not eat or drink 2 hours **before** and **after** taking the capsule.

## Going home after you have swallowed the thyrotoxic dose

- You can drive yourself home. If someone else is driving you home, sit on the back seat, diagonally opposite the driver to make the distance between you as wide as possible.
- You can travel home by public transport as long as the journey takes no more than one hour.

## Radioiodine clearance

After your radioiodine treatment, your body will contain some radioactivity, which will decrease every day. Most of the radioiodine leaves your body in your urine and sweat during the first few days after your treatment. Drinking plenty of fluids over the next week will speed up this process.

### For a week after swallowing the capsule please do the following

- Flush the toilet twice after use and ensure your hands are washed well. Men should sit whilst going to the toilet.
- Ensure that you wash your hands well before preparing food and wash all your cutlery thoroughly.

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## Restrictions on your contact with other people

To protect other people from radiation you need to restrict your contact with them. The restrictions will apply to people you see regularly such as people you live or work with and will be specific to your circumstances.

Full written details of the restrictions will be given to you on the 'Radionuclide Instruction Sheet' when you come for the appointment. Please carry this sheet with you at all times whilst the contact restrictions still apply. Show this sheet to healthcare workers if you go to the doctor or into hospital as a patient so that they are aware that you have recently had the treatment.

- For the next two weeks after swallowing the capsule ensure that you stay at least 1 metre away from children over 5 years of age and adults with whom you have regular contact. This may delay your return to work (see below).
- Typically, you will need to sleep separately from a partner for about 2 weeks. The beds should be at least 1 metre apart. This distance still applies if the beds are in rooms next to each other.
- There will be restrictions lasting up to 4 weeks on the amount of contact you should have with any children under 5 years of age and pregnant women with whom you normally have regular contact. During this period you should stay at least 1 metre away from them.

## Going back to work

There may also be a delay before you can return to work; typically you can expect to take up to 2 weeks off. This period will vary according to your occupation and may be longer if you work with children. A member of staff will discuss this with you when you come for your appointment.

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## Starting a family

- **Female patients** must **not** become pregnant in the **six months** following treatment
- **Male patients** must **not** father a child in the **four months** following treatment.

## Travelling abroad

If you plan to travel abroad in the 6 months following your treatment, please be aware that the security gates at ports and airports use very sensitive radiation detectors. They may be able to detect the very low levels of radiation coming from you. We will provide you with a letter detailing your treatment, which you can show to security officers. But we cannot guarantee that you will not experience any difficulties when travelling abroad.

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## Additional information

### How long does the radioiodine take to work?

It can take between a few weeks and several months for the treatment to work fully. Most people with overactive thyroids (80–90% of people) are cured by a single dose of radioiodine. In some cases (10-20%), further treatments are necessary.

### How will the success of the treatment be monitored?

You will have to have regular blood tests to monitor how the treatment is affecting your thyroid gland.

## Are there any short-term side effects?

Most people notice no side effects from the treatment. A few people develop symptoms of an overactive thyroid (such as palpitations and sweating), usually five to ten days after the treatment. These symptoms are usually minor, and they pass without problems. If however, you experience severe symptoms you should contact your GP.

Thyroid eye disease (which can develop if you have Graves' disease) may get worse after the treatment. This happens with about 1 out of 6 patients with Graves' disease. The doctor will discuss this with you before you have the treatment and will prescribe medication if necessary.

### Neck Oedema

Slight swelling of the neck tissue occurs in about 1 out of 10 patients, a couple of days after treatment. The swelling usually resolves within a week of treatment. You can take paracetamol or aspirin to relieve these symptoms.

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## Are there any long-term side-effects?

### Hypothyroidism

Your thyroid gland may become underactive at a time ranging from a few months after treatment to many years later, causing 'hypothyroidism.' In a small number of people, this happens quite soon after radioiodine treatment. You will have regular follow up blood tests which will show whether this has happened.

If your thyroid gland does become underactive, your doctor will usually give you thyroxine tablets to replace the thyroxine that your thyroid gland is no longer producing. The tablets are very safe and contain a man-made version of the natural thyroxine that your body is unable to produce enough of. It may take a little time to find the right dose of thyroxine for you. Once you start taking thyroxine tablets, you will need to take them for the rest of your life.

### Cancer

There is no strong evidence to suggest that treating with radioiodine increases the chances of getting a cancer.

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## Frequently asked questions

### Why are the restrictions on contact with pregnant women and children greater than for adults?

Unborn babies and children are more sensitive to the effects of radiation than adults. So a longer restriction period is required. It is important to stay at least 1 metre away from them during the restriction period.

### Do I need to stay away from public places until the restriction periods end?

**No.** You can go to public places. Passing people in the street or in a shop is not a problem. The restrictions will apply only with people you see regularly and repeatedly.

### Do I need to restrict contact with my pets?

We offer no specific guidance on this but feel free to discuss this with us on the treatment day.

### Is radioiodine treatment dangerous?

**No,** its safety record is excellent. Radioiodine treatment has been given to millions of people since it was introduced in the early 1940s.

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## More information

You can get more information about radioiodine treatment and thyroid disease from:

### The British Thyroid Foundation

PO Box 97  
Clifford  
Wetherby  
West Yorkshire  
LS23 6XD

Phone or fax: 01423 709707 or 01423 709448

Website: [www.btf-thyroid.org](http://www.btf-thyroid.org)

If you have any further concerns or questions about the **radiation restrictions**, please phone **0116 258 5627** during normal working hours (9-5pm) and ask to speak to a physicist.

If you experience any **medical** problems then we would advise that you contact your GP.

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## Your questions

Use this space for writing your questions/ comments as they arise. Feel free to raise them with a member of the staff.

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If you would like this information in another language or format, please contact the Service Equality Manager on 0116 258 4382

आपनि यदि এই লিফলেটের অনুবাদ - লিখিত বা অডিও টেপ'এ চান, তাহলে অনুগ্রহ করে সার্ভিস ইকুয়ালিটি ম্যানেজার ডেভ বেকার'এর সাথে 0116 2584382 নাম্বারে যোগাযোগ করুন।

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