

Having radioiodine therapy for an overactive thyroid

Department of Nuclear Medicine

Information for Patients

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We have been asked by your consultant to give you thyrotoxicosis therapy.

Please read this booklet carefully. It gives you important information about the procedure. It will explain:

- 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 tablet. You will need to swallow this with water. The radioactivity kills some of your thyroid cells. This reduces the overactivity of your thyroid gland. **The capsule contains a small amount of gelatine. Please speak to your consultant if you have any concerns.**

How do I prepare for this treatment?

- If you are taking carbimazole or propylthiouracil, you will need to stop taking this drug shortly before treatment. Your consultant will talk to you about this.
- If you need ambulance transport to and from your appointment, please let us know before your appointment by calling 0116 258 5627.
- **Please follow the low iodine diet information sheet. This is to make sure you do not eat foods, supplements or medicines that contain a lot of iodine before treatment.**

Health information and support is available at www.nhs.uk
or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice

Visit www.leicestershospitals.nhs.uk for maps and information about visiting Leicester's Hospitals
To give feedback about this information sheet, contact InformationForPatients@uhl-tr.nhs.uk

On the day of your 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 before your appointment if you find it hard to swallow capsules.
- **Please do not eat or drink for 2 hours before and 2 hours after taking the capsule.**

Planning your journey home after your treatment:

- 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 1 hour.

Advice to follow after you have swallowed the radioiodine capsule

After your radioiodine treatment, your body will contain some radioactivity, which will decrease every day. Most of the radioiodine leaves your body in your pee (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:

- flush the toilet twice after use and make sure you wash your hands well. Men should sit down when going for a pee.
- make sure you wash your hands well before preparing food and wash all your used cutlery thoroughly.

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 2 weeks after swallowing the capsule you should stay at least 1 metre away from children over 5 years of age and adults you have regular contact with. This may delay your return to work.
- You will need to sleep in a different bed to your partner for about 2 weeks. The beds should be at least 1 metre apart. This distance still applies if the beds are in different rooms.

For up to 4 weeks you should stay at least 1 metre away from children under 5 years old and pregnant women you would normally have regular contact with.

Going back to work:

You will need to take at least 2 weeks off work. You may need to take more time off depending on your job and if you work with children. A member of staff will talk about this with you when you come for your appointment. If you have any questions about this before your appointment, you can contact the nuclear medicine department.

Pregnancy, breastfeeding and starting a family:

If you were registered as male at birth, radioiodine can temporarily damage your sperm cells. You are advised to use effective contraception and not conceive a child for 4 months after treatment. If you have any family planning concerns or special circumstances please discuss them with your consultant, or with nuclear medicine.

If you were registered as female at birth you should not be given radioactive iodine if there is any chance that you might be pregnant or are breastfeeding. This is due to the radiation risk to unborn children and breastfed infants.

If you are aged 55 or younger, you will be asked to have a pregnancy test. You should also avoid sexual activities for 15 days before your treatment. This is so that an early pregnancy is not missed by the test. This may not be needed if there is a reason you cannot get pregnant, such as:

- You have gone through your menopause and have not had a period in the last 2 years
- You have had surgery that means you cannot get pregnant

You should avoid pregnancy and use an effective method of contraception for 6 to 12 months after treatment. You may need to start using your contraceptive before your treatment date. This will depend on the contraceptive method you choose.

If you are breastfeeding, you should stop 8 weeks before treatment and not start again with the child you currently feed.

After the time periods above, family planning is considered to be safe with no extra risks from radioactive iodine treatment. Breastfeeding a child conceived after your radioiodine therapy (following the advice above) is safe.

If you have any family planning concerns or special circumstances please discuss them with your consultant, or with nuclear medicine.

Travelling abroad:

If you plan to travel abroad in the 6 months after 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 give you information that you can show to security officers if needed.

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 to 90% of people) are cured by a single dose of radioiodine. In some cases (10 to 20%) more treatments are needed.

How will the success of the treatment be monitored?

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

Are there any short-term side effects?

- Most people have no side effects from the treatment.
- A few people get symptoms of an overactive thyroid such as heart palpitations and sweating. This usually happens 5 to 10 days after the treatment. These symptoms are usually minor, and they go away without problems. If you have 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 needed.
- Slight swelling of the neck tissue (neck oedema) happens in about 1 out of 10 patients, a couple of days after treatment. The swelling usually goes down within a week of treatment. You can take paracetamol or aspirin to help with this.

Are there any long-term side effects?

- Your thyroid gland may become underactive (hypothyroidism). This may happen a few months after treatment or many years later. 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 thyroxin that your thyroid gland is no longer producing. The tablets are very safe and contain a man-made version of the natural thyroxin that your body is unable to make 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.

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

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 needed. 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 period ends?

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 do not offer specific guidance on this but feel free to discuss this with us on the day of treatment.

Is the radioiodine dangerous?

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

Where to find us

Leicester Royal Infirmary - Level 0, Sandringham Building (behind the multi-storey car park).

Contact details

If you have any more concerns or questions about your restrictions due to radiation, please call 0116 258 5627 during normal working hours (9am to 5pm) and ask to speak to a physicist.

For information about your treatment, please contact:

Nuclear medicine department, Leicester Royal Infirmary: 0116 258 5627

Leicester Radiopharmacy Service: 0116 258 5579

The answering machine is checked during office hours.

If you have a question about your medical condition please contact your GP or the doctor who sent you for this treatment.



More information

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

British Thyroid Foundation

Suite 12, One Sceptre House

Hornbeam Square North

Hornbeam Park

Harrogate

HG2 8BP

Phone: 01423 810093

Website: www.btf-thyroid.org

Other useful websites:

- www.bnms.org.uk
- www.radiologyinfo.org
- www.patient.co.uk

اگر آپ کو یہ معلومات کسی اور زبان میں درکار ہیں، تو براہ کرم مندرجہ ذیل نمبر پر ٹیلی فون کریں۔
على هذه المعلومات بلغة أخرى، الرجاء الاتصال على رقم الهاتف الذي يظهر في الأسفل

જો તમને અન્ય ભાષામાં આ માહિતી જોઈતી હોય, તો નીચે આપેલ નંબર પર કૃપા કરી ટેલિફોન કરો

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Aby uzyskać informacje w innym języku, proszę zadzwonić pod podany niżej numer telefonu

If you would like this information in another language or format such as EasyRead or Braille, please telephone 0116 250 2959 or email equality@uhl-tr.nhs.uk