

Thyroid Ablation Therapy

Medical Physics and Clinical Engineering Department

Who is this information for?

This leaflet has been written to help you understand more about the treatment options open to you.

This leaflet tells you about the treatment known as Radioactive Iodine Therapy or Thyroid Ablation Therapy. It explains what is involved and some of the common complications associated with this procedure.

It is not meant to replace discussion between you and your medical team, but as a guide to help you in making your decision.

What is Radioactive Iodine?

Radioactive iodine is a radioactive form of iodine. Iodine is present in some of the food you eat and is used by your thyroid to produce thyroid hormones which help regulate your metabolism.

What can I expect before the treatment starts?

Following the removal of your thyroid gland you may have been given thyroxine medication to take. There are two options available to prepare your body for this treatment.

1. Your doctor may decide to leave you on your thyroid medication and give you thyrogen injections. You will have appointments to attend the hospital on the two days before your Radioactive Iodine Therapy for this injection
2. Or your doctor may decide to discontinue your thyroid medication as outlined below:
 - a. If you are taking T3 Liothyronine tablets, these should be stopped for two weeks before your radioactive iodine therapy. If you are on T4 Thyroxine tablets, you will be advised to stop taking them for four weeks before the Radioactive Iodine Therapy, (RAI). In this four week period, your doctor may first change you to T3 Liothyronine tablets for two weeks, and then stop your tablets altogether for the last two weeks before your treatment
 - b. You are likely to feel weak and tired when you are not taking your tablets. This is normal and will disappear once you start taking them again. This will usually be three days after you have had your radioactive iodine
 - c. It is important that you follow instructions given to you by your doctor about stopping your thyroid medication

The prevention of infection is a major priority in all healthcare and everyone has a part to play.

- Please decontaminate your hands frequently for 20 seconds using soap and water or alcohol gel if available
- If you have symptoms of diarrhoea and/or vomiting, cough or other respiratory symptoms, a temperature or any loss of taste or smell please do not visit the hospital or any other care facility and seek advice from 111
- Keep the environment clean and tidy
- Let's work together to keep infections out of our hospitals and care homes.

You will be provided with an information guide, and asked to follow a low iodine diet for two weeks prior to your treatment date. Once you have had your treatment you will be able to go back onto your normal diet.

You will need to complete a consent form (in the presence of your referring consultant) prior to receiving this treatment. The choice about which treatment is best for you will be made together with your consultant. This will be based on the risks and benefits of the treatment and your individual circumstances.

How is the treatment given?

You will have been diagnosed with thyroid cancer and had an operation to remove the thyroid. The next step in your treatment plan is to have a Thyroid Ablation Therapy.

The Thyroid Ablation Therapy is given as a capsule which will need to be swallowed. The radioactive iodine is taken up by any residual thyroid tissue and by any thyroid cancer cells and helps destroy them.

Any radioactivity not taken up by the thyroid will be passed out of your body, mainly in your urine, but also in your sweat and saliva.

What are the benefits of having the treatment?

The radioactive iodine will give a dose of radiation to any remaining thyroid cells left after your operation helping to destroy them.

Is radioactive iodine therapy safe?

Radioactive iodine cannot be given to pregnant women or breast feeding mothers.

Radioactive iodine has been used to treat thyroid cancer for over 50 years and is extremely safe. The treatment aims to destroy any thyroid cells that may have escaped surgical removal. There has been extensive research into this method of treatment. While no one would say that any treatment is 100% safe, there is little risk of developing other cancers.

If you are unsure or have any questions, please talk it through with your specialist consultant or a member of the treatment team.

The precautions which are described in this leaflet are intended to protect other people, who still have a thyroid gland, particularly pregnant women and young children. It is best practice to reduce everyone's unnecessary exposure to radioactivity, as any one of us may need this form of treatment in the future.

You will normally need to stay in hospital for two to four days. This depends on how quickly your radiation levels drop down to a level that you can go home. Although you will not be aware of it, as there are no outward signs, you will be radioactive whilst you are in hospital and for a short while after you go home. Certain precautions have to be taken during that time to prevent other people receiving a dose of radiation from you, no matter how small.

Pregnant women and young children are most at risk. You will be given information telling you about the precautions you need to take and for how long you need to take them.

What if I am pregnant or breastfeeding?

It is very important that you do not have radioactive iodine therapy if you are pregnant or think that there is a good chance that you may be. Please let your medical staff know if you are unsure before you have any treatment.

It is important not to become pregnant when having investigations for thyroid cancer. You should use a reliable contraceptive until all treatment has finished and you have had approval from your specialist consultant.

If you are breastfeeding, you should stop this before you have the radioactive iodine treatment.

We strongly advise against pregnancy or fathering a child for six months after radioactive iodine treatment.

Will the treatment affect my ability to have children?

In the long term, your fertility should not be affected. There may be a small risk if repeated radioactive iodine therapy is needed. Please discuss this with your specialist consultant or a member of the treatment team for the statistics and before trying for a family following this treatment. Specialist advice and help is available.

What can I do, as a patient, to help during the treatment?

We advise you to drink plenty of fluids to flush out any radioactive iodine not taken up by tissues. You may wish to bring some squash / juice with you.

Since some radioactivity comes out in your sweat, we will provide hospital nightwear and towels, or you may prefer to bring some old nightwear that you can leave here to be disposed of when you go home.

Disposable crockery and cutlery will be provided during your stay.

You will be in a side room with your own bathroom, telephone and television (payment required). During your treatment you will have to stay within your room on the ward.

There is a charge per day for the television and telephone. This can either be paid by buying a card from one of the several machines throughout the hospital, or by phoning the operator from the phone in the room and using your debit/credit card.

You may bring magazines, but since some radioactivity may go on to the pages we do not recommend that you bring books.

Should I be taking my other medication / tablets?

If you are taking any other tablets (not for your thyroid), you should continue to do so. Bring a supply of them when you come into hospital and show them to the medical team.

If you are taking any vitamin or mineral supplements or cod liver oil, stop taking them around three weeks before your therapy to help reduce your iodine levels. Please avoid cough medicines which may contain iodine.

What happens after the treatment?

The staff from the Medical Physics department will come to the ward to take measurements, and they can then work out how much radiation is still in your body and if the level is safe for you to go home. You must stay in your side room until that time.

A precaution sheet will be given to you explaining the radiation precautions about contact with others especially pregnant women and young children.

If you have any questions or concerns about these please contact the team and we will be happy to answer them.

You will also be given an appointment for a scan in the Nuclear Imaging department and a follow up clinic appointment with your consultant.

Will I need to have radioactive iodine treatment again?

The treatment may need to be repeated until all the remaining thyroid tissue has been destroyed. Some people require one ablation dose, while others may need further treatment.

Are there any risks involved in having the treatment?

There are nearly always side effects to any treatment. Here are some of the side effects that may occur;

- You may experience a sore throat. Your doctor may prescribe a simple pain treatment, such as aspirin or paracetamol for the soreness
- You may have some swelling in the neck area. If the swelling is uncomfortable, a steroid tablet may be prescribed

- Your sense of taste may also be temporarily affected. This can happen a few weeks after the treatment and should only last a few days
- You may feel flushed which usually lasts for no more than 24 hours

Are there any long term side effects from the treatment?

- Your salivary glands in your mouth which help keep your mouth moist may be affected. This can lead to a dry mouth. Drinking plenty of water and sucking citrus fruit sweets can help to reduce this problem
- You will need to take a thyroid replacement hormone. This will be discussed with your referring consultant prior to treatment

Are there any alternatives to having this treatment?

Your doctor will discuss any other treatment options that may be available to you. The choice about which treatment is best for you will be made together with your specialist consultant. This will be based on the risks and benefits of the treatments and your individual circumstances. Your doctor will also discuss with you what would happen if you decided not to have radioactive iodine treatment.

Where can I get more information?

The staff of the Medical Physics Department will be pleased to answer any questions you may have before attending for your appointment.

Our phone number is 01902 694172. The department is open between 9:00am – 5:00pm, Monday to Friday.

English

If you need information in another way like easy read or a different language please let us know.

If you need an interpreter or assistance please let us know.

Lithuanian

Jeigu norėtumėte, kad informacija jums būtų pateikta kitu būdu, pavyzdžiui, supaprastinta forma ar kita kalba, prašome mums apie tai pranešti.

Jeigu jums reikia vertėjo ar kitos pagalbos, prašome mums apie tai pranešti.

Polish

Jeżeli chcieliby Państwo otrzymać te informacje w innej postaci, na przykład w wersji łatwej do czytania lub w innym języku, prosimy powiedzieć nam o tym.

Prosimy poinformować nas również, jeżeli potrzebowaliby Państwo usługi tłumaczenia ustnego lub innej pomocy.

Punjabi

ਜੇ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਰੂਪ ਵਿਚ, ਜਿਵੇਂ ਪੜ੍ਹਨ ਵਿਚ ਆਸਾਨ ਰੂਪ ਜਾਂ ਕਿਸੇ ਦੂਜੀ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿਚ, ਚਾਹੀਦੀ ਹੈ ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਸਾਨੂੰ ਦੱਸੋ।

ਜੇ ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਦੁਭਾਸ਼ੀਏ ਦੀ ਜਾਂ ਸਹਾਇਤਾ ਦੀ ਲੋੜ ਹੈ ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਸਾਨੂੰ ਦੱਸੋ।

Romanian

Dacă aveți nevoie de informații în alt format, ca de exemplu caractere ușor de citit sau altă limbă, vă rugăm să ne informați.

Dacă aveți nevoie de un interpret sau de asistență, vă rugăm să ne informați.

Traditional Chinese

如果您需要以其他方式了解信息，如易读或其他语种，请告诉我们。

如果您需要口译人员或帮助，请告诉我们。