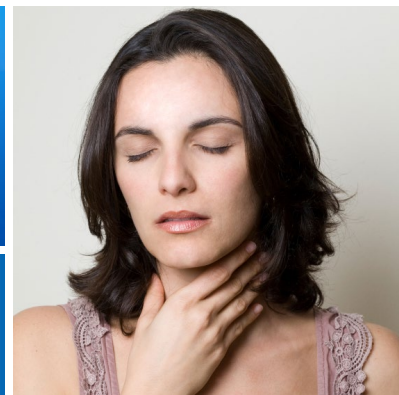


Radioactive iodine treatment for thyroid cancer



You'll soon be starting treatment with radioactive iodine. Here's some information that will help you prepare yourself and understand how your treatment will proceed.

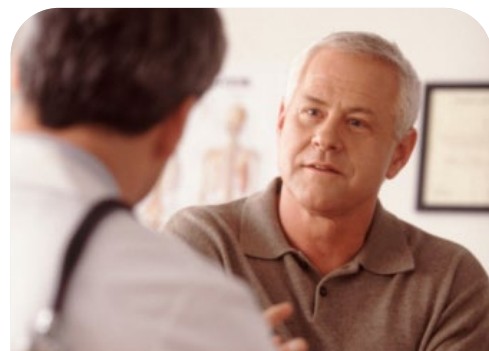
What is radioactive iodine treatment?

The treatment involves swallowing a capsule or liquid that contains radioactive iodine. Once it's in the body, radioactive iodine is captured by the cells in the thyroid (normal cells and cancer cells) and destroys all of them.

Why am I being treated with radioactive iodine?

The goal of this treatment is to destroy any cancer cells in the thyroid that were not removed during the operation. Most people who receive this treatment have had their thyroid removed. (That operation is called a thyroidectomy.)

Radioactive iodine also destroys normal cells. But the treatment reduces the risks of having the cancer return, and increases your chances of a complete recovery.



What are the contra-indications for this treatment?

You can't have radioactive iodine treatment if:

- you've had certain medical tests or treatments that are incompatible with radioactive iodine (your doctor will ask you about this)
- you're a pregnant woman, or a woman who is breastfeeding or has breastfed in the past 2 months



If you're breastfeeding, you will need to stop completely at least 2 months before starting radioactive iodine treatment. When a woman is breastfeeding, her breasts retain much more iodine than under normal conditions. This is why you will need to stop breastfeeding so that your breasts do not accumulate too much radioactive iodine.



ATTENTION

If you're taking medication for high blood pressure, talk to your doctor.

How should I prepare **BEFORE** my radioactive iodine treatment?

It's extremely important to prepare properly. Prior to the treatment the thyroid cells need to be stimulated in order to increase the absorption of radioactive iodine. This can be done by raising the level of thyroid-stimulating hormone (TSH for short).

There are 2 ways of raising the TSH level. Your doctor will suggest **one or the other of these**. Follow your doctor's instructions carefully.

1 Taking injectable medication (Thyrogen)

If your doctor prescribes Thyrogen, you will be given your first injection the night before the treatment and the second the next morning.

This medication has few side effects. However, you may feel some nausea, headache and dizziness after the injection.

2 Quitting the intake of hormone replacements (Synthroid)

Synthroid replaces the hormones your thyroid used to produce before the operation. You will need to stop taking them 3 to 4 weeks before your radioactive iodine treatment. This creates a state of hypothyroidism.

Hypothyroidism can cause various side effects:

- fatigue
- intolerance to cold
- slow heartbeat
- constipation
- concentration problems

Should I be eating or avoiding certain foods before starting radioactive iodine treatment?

You should minimize your consumption of food that contains iodine 14 days before you start treatment. For more details on this diet, see our information sheet on low-iodine diets. **This is extremely important so your radioactive iodine treatment will be effective.**

You should continue to limit foods that contain iodine for 2 days after the end of your treatment. After that, you can start to eat normally again.



What does radioactive iodine treatment involve?

The treatment may be given at the hospital or at home, depending on your case.

If you need to get Thyrogen injections, you'll go to the hospital for the first injection and a blood test, then again the next morning for your second injection. In the afternoon, you'll receive radioactive iodine in capsule or liquid form, to be taken orally.

If you need to be hospitalized, you'll be able to leave the hospital about 24 hours after your treatment.

What side effects does radioactive iodine treatment have?

Treatment with radioactive iodine can cause certain side effects.

During treatment:

- nausea
- vomiting
- fatigue
- mouth pain

Later, up to one year after treatment:

- trouble really tasting your food (for about 1 month)
- pain in your cheeks
- runny eyes
- dry mouth
- miscarriage

These side effects are generally treatable and temporary. But sometimes they stay for good. Feel free to talk to your doctor, who can recommend appropriate treatments.

How is radioactive iodine eliminated from the body?

In the days after your treatment, your body will eliminate the radioactive iodine, mainly through your urine, stools, saliva and sweat.

We advise drinking normal amounts of liquids. However, you may be asked to drink more during the 15 to 18 hours following treatment. This will help evacuate the radioactive iodine more quickly.

Make sure you take a shower every day and that you have regular bowel movements.



Are there precautions I should take AFTER radioactive iodine treatment?

Even if the level of radiation is low, you'll still need to pay attention to some details to protect family members and friends.

We recommend that you take the following precautions for **5 days** after your treatment.

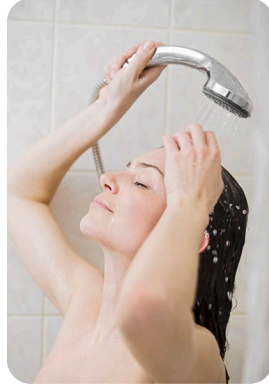
Relations with family/friends or the general public

- Plan to take at least 5 days off work.
- Avoid contact with other people as if you had a contagious disease. Especially avoid coming into contact with pregnant women and small children.
- Stay about one metre (arm's length) from family and friends.
- Don't sleep in the same bed as your spouse.
- Don't share everyday objects like dishes, toothbrushes, clothing, etc.
- Ask your doctor for advice if you need to share toilets and bathrooms with other people.
- Avoid public spaces (stores, buses, etc.).

Hygiene

- Use individual towels and facecloths.
- Use a toothbrush that will be thrown out after this period.
- Wash your hands after each activity.
- Urinate sitting down on the toilet to avoid splashing.
- Flush at least twice every time you use the toilet.
- Wash your hands after going to the toilet.

- Take a shower if you've been sweating a lot.
- Wear your dentures as little as possible. Wash them well and throw out the water you used to clean them.
- To promote the production of saliva, eat fruit and sour candy and chew gum.



Clothing and objects

- Wash your clothing and bedding (sheets, towels, etc.) separately from those used by others. Keep your dirty clothing in a plastic bag away from shared spaces before they go into the laundry.
- Wash personal objects and rinse them well every time you use them (toothbrush, comb, etc.).
- Be careful not to mix up your things with others'.
- Wear your glasses instead of contact lenses.

Will I need to have tests after my treatment?

About 5 to 10 days after your treatment, you'll be given an appointment in nuclear medicine to have images of your entire body taken. This is called whole-body scintigraphy.

These images will show the precise distribution of the radioactive iodine in your body, and evaluate your response to the treatment. You will be asked to lie on an examining table with cameras above and around you. This examination is painless and lasts for 30 to 60 minutes.

Will I be able to get pregnant AFTER this treatment?

Avoid getting pregnant for at least 12 months after your treatment. Talk to your doctor for further information on this.

Who should I ask for help or answers to my questions?

Before your treatment, you can call the ENT clinic, from Monday to Friday between 8:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m.

> 514 890-8235

After your treatment, call a CHUM nurse.

> 514 890-8086

This support service is available 24 hours/day, 7 days/week. When calling, be sure to have your health insurance (RAMQ) card on hand.



USEFUL RESOURCES

Thyroid Cancer Canada:

> 514 312-2390

> thyroidcancer.ca

Canadian Cancer Society:

> 1 888 939-3333

> cancer.ca

Other health sheets published by the CHUM are available. Ask for those that might fit your situation.



You can also find them on our web site

chumontreal.qc.ca/fiches-sante

The content of this document in no way replaces the recommendations and diagnoses made, or the treatment suggested by your health professional.

To find out more about the Centre hospitalier de l'Université de Montréal
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