Radioiodine Treatment for Hyperthyroidism / Thyrotoxicosis

Endocrinology
Medicine

This leaflet has been designed to give you important information about your condition / procedure, and to answer some common queries that you may have.
Introduction – What is hyperthyroidism?
Your thyroid gland is in your neck, in front of your windpipe. It produces a hormone called thyroxine which acts as your ‘body clock’, keeping your body working properly. Thyroxine has a direct effect on your heart rate, bowel activity, skin and organs. Hyperthyroidism (also known as Graves’ disease, thyrotoxicosis and overactive thyroid) develops when your thyroid gland produces too much thyroxine, making your body clock run too fast.

What is radioiodine treatment?
Radioiodine treatment uses radioactive iodine to cure hyperthyroidism. The radioactivity destroys the overactive thyroid tissue and stops the production of thyroxine.

How is radioiodine given?
The radioiodine is given as a capsule. The capsule looks like those used for many other medicines and you swallow it whole with a drink of water. You will meet up with the specialist in the radioiodine clinic initially. If you agree to have the treatment, you will be given a date to attend for the capsule to be given.

How long does radioiodine take to work?
It can take between a few weeks and several months for the treatment to work.
Most people with hyperthyroidism (80–90% of people) are cured by a single dose of radioiodine. If the treatment has not worked within six months, it can be repeated. Your specialist will arrange for blood tests after the treatment and arrange to see you in the clinic to ensure the treatment is working.

What about my tablets?
If you have been given anti-thyroid tablets (carbamazole or propylthiouracil) to control your hyperthyroidism, it is important that you stop taking them before radioiodine treatment can be given.
The letter giving you your appointment for the day of radioiodine treatment will tell you when to stop taking your tablets. Also, if you are taking any tablets which contain iodine or kelp (a seaweed which contains iodine), such as vitamin or mineral supplements, you will need to stop taking them at least a week before being treated with radioiodine.

Is radioiodine treatment dangerous?
No. The thyroid gland uses most of the iodine, so only a small amount of radioactivity is needed. Radioiodine treatment has been given to millions of people since it was introduced in the early 1940s with an excellent safety record.

Are there any short term side effects?
Most people notice no side effects from the treatment. A few people may develop symptoms of an overactive thyroid (such as palpitations and sweating), usually five to ten days after the treatment.
For this reason, your doctor may tell you to take a tablet called a beta-blocker for a few weeks after the treatment, and they may tell you to start taking your anti-thyroid tablets again.
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. The blood tests will show whether this has happened.

If your thyroid gland does become underactive, your doctor will 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. You will not have to pay prescription charges for thyroxine tablets.

For a very small number of patients, thyroid eye disease (which can develop in Graves’ disease) may get worse after the treatment. The doctor will discuss this with you before you have the treatment and may suggest that you take a steroid called prednisolone for a month or two after the treatment.

Will there be any danger to my family or friends?

After your radioiodine treatment, your body will contain some radioactivity, which will decrease every day. If you follow the advice you are given, other people may receive only an insignificant radiation dose from you. You will be able to continue shopping, cooking and doing other day-to-day household activities as normal.

However, you will need to take some simple precautions for some time after your treatment to stop your family, friends and other people coming into contact with too much of the radiation.

What safety measures should I take after radioiodine treatment?

Most of the radioiodine goes to the thyroid gland within a few hours. The rest will pass out of your body in your urine during the first few days after treatment. How long this will take depends on the dose of radioiodine that you are given. Most of the radioiodine leaves your body in your urine and sweat during the first few days after your treatment. Drinking plenty of fluids and going to the toilet a lot will speed this up process:

- Men should pass urine sitting down on the toilet to avoid getting radioiodine on the edge of the toilet
- After going to the toilet you should flush it twice
- Always wash your hands well after going to the toilet
- Make sure that no one else uses your towels and face cloths
- Wash all your crockery and cutlery thoroughly

How long will I be restricted from close contact with other family members and friends?

The time for which you will be limited from close contact with others will depend on the amount of radioiodine you have been given. Your specialist will give you advice on the precautions at least a week before your treatment.

You can travel home by public transport as long as you do not spend more than one hour sitting next to the same person on the bus, train or tube. You can drive yourself home. If someone else is driving you home, you should sit on the back seat, as far away from them as possible.
How long should I be careful about work and travel?

Your specialist will advise you about the following activities at least a week before your treatment is given. How long these precautions will apply for will depend on the amount of radioiodine you receive. Different precautions may apply for different lengths of time, but some may be for up to two to four weeks.

For the time advised:

- Limit your contact with children, especially children under 3 years of age. If you have your own children or have a job where you have contact with children, it is important to talk to the specialist about this as soon as possible.
- Stay more than an arm’s length away from other people.
- Sleep alone.
- Take a few days off work if your job brings you into close contact with other people.
- Avoid going to places like cinemas, theatres, pubs and restaurants, where you may be in close contact with other people.
- Avoid travelling on public transport, apart from your journey home from hospital.
- Your specialist will give you a card with the details of your treatment. You should carry this with you until you no longer have to follow any of these instructions. You should also carry the card with you if you are travelling through ports or on international flights for six months after treatment. Some security devices at airports are so sensitive that they may detect that you have had radioiodine treatment even after this length of time.

Are there any risks in having children after radioiodine treatment?

The treatment does not affect the fertility of a man or woman.

If you are a woman, you should avoid getting pregnant for six months after your treatment. Sixty years of experience has shown that in those who have become pregnant after six months of radioiodine treatment, no effects were noted on the unborn babies or on the health of those children.

If you are a man, you should not father children for four months after radioiodine treatment.

Can I have the treatment if I am pregnant or breast feeding?

No. Radioiodine can harm unborn babies of pregnant women and babies that are still being breast fed. You will not be given radioiodine treatment if you are pregnant or wish to continue breast feeding.

More Information

You can get more information about radioiodine treatment 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-thyoid.org
Information for patients and visitors

If you have any questions or you need more advice, please call the following number to contact the endocrinology secretaries:
DPOWH: 01472 874111 (extension 2865)
SGH: 01724 282282 (extension 5740 / 2981)

Reference

Concerns and Queries
If you have any concerns / queries about any of the services offered by the Trust, in the first instance, please speak to the person providing your care.

For Diana, Princess of Wales Hospital
Alternatively you can contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on (01472) 875403 or at the PALS office which is situated near the main entrance.

For Scunthorpe General Hospital
Alternatively you can contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on (01724) 290132 or at the PALS office which situated on C Floor.
Alternatively you can email: nlg-tr.PALS@nhs.net

Confidentiality
Information on NHS patients is collected in a variety of ways and for a variety of reasons (e.g. providing care and treatment, managing and planning the NHS, training and educating staff, research etc.).

Everyone working for the NHS has a legal duty to keep information about you confidential. Information will only ever be shared with people who have a genuine need for it (e.g. your GP or other professionals from whom you have been receiving care) or if the law requires it, for example, to notify a birth.

Please be assured however that anyone who receives information from us is also under a legal duty to keep it confidential.

Zero Tolerance - Violent, Threatening and Abusive Behaviour
The Trust and its staff are committed to providing high quality care to patients within the department. However, we wish to advise all patients / visitors that the following inappropriate behaviour will not be tolerated:
- Swearing
- Threatening / abusive behaviour
- Verbal / physical abuse

The Trust reserves the right to withdraw from treating patients whom are threatening / abusive / violent and ensuring the removal of those persons from the premises.

All acts of criminal violence and aggression will be notified to the Police immediately.

Risk Management Strategy
The Trust welcomes comments and suggestions from patients and visitors that could help to reduce risk.

Perhaps you have experienced something whilst in hospital, whilst attending as an outpatient or as a visitor and you felt at risk.

Please tell a member of staff on the ward or in the department you are attending / visiting.
Moving & Handling

The Trust operates a Minimal Lifting Policy, which in essence means patients are only ever lifted by nursing staff in an emergency situation.

Patients are always encouraged to help themselves as much as possible when mobilising, and if unable to do so, equipment may be used to assist in their safe transfer.

If you have any questions regarding moving and handling of patients within the Trust, please speak to a member of staff in the ward or department you are visiting.

Northern Lincolnshire and Goole NHS Foundation Trust

Diana Princess of Wales Hospital
Scartho Road
Grimsby
01472 874111

Scunthorpe General Hospital
Cliff Gardens
Scunthorpe
01724 282282

Goole & District Hospital
Woodland Avenue
Goole
01405 720720

www.nlg.nhs.uk

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