

**A Patient's Guide to
Radioiodine therapy for
Thyrotoxicosis
at Mount Vernon Hospital**

Patient Information Series No 14

Consent

It is a legal requirement to have a signed Consent Form from you before the start of your treatment.

If you have already been given one of these forms, please bring the completed form with you when you come for your first appointment.

If you have not been given a form, this will be discussed with you at your first appointment.

Identification

Please note that it is a legal requirement for the staff to check your name and details against your treatment sheet every time you attend.

This leaflet has been written by staff in the Medical Physics Department, (Nuclear Medicine) together with oncologists and health professionals, at Mount Vernon Hospital as well as staff, patients and carers at the Lynda Jackson Macmillan Centre (LJMC).

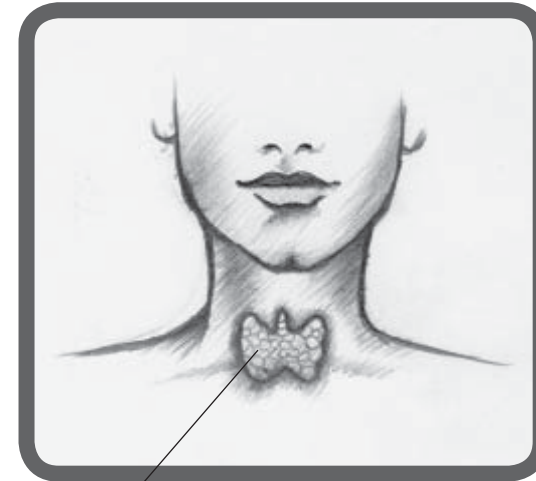
If you have difficulty reading this size of print, a version of this leaflet or any of our leaflets can be produced for you in a larger print.

This leaflet has been written in accordance with the East and North Herts NHS Trust protocol for patients with thyrotoxicosis.

A Patient's Guide to Radioiodine therapy for Thyrotoxicosis at Mount Vernon Hospital

Contents

Introduction	5
What is radioiodine therapy?	5
Where is the treatment given?	6
How is treatment given?	6
Will I have to sign a consent form?	7
What about pregnancy and breast-feeding?	7
What must I do to prepare for treatment?	8
Are there any side-effects from this treatment?	9
Are there any long-term side-effects?	9
When will I know whether the treatment has worked?	10
Will I have more than one treatment?	10
Will I become radioactive after the treatment?	10
Hygiene	11
When can I return to work after the treatment?	12
What about my family & contacts once I am at home?	12
What about contact with children/pregnant women?	13
What about travelling?	14
Can I change my appointment once made?	15



thyroid gland

Illustration by the LMC Information Team © 2004

Introduction

This leaflet is written for patients having radioiodine treatment for an overactive thyroid gland. This condition is called thyrotoxicosis.

Thyrotoxicosis is a disorder of the thyroid gland in the neck, which can affect both men and women, resulting in the excessive production of thyroid hormones. One way of treating this condition is by using radioactive iodine (radioiodine).

Please note that the only reason this treatment is under the control of a cancer specialist, is simply because it uses a radioactive form of treatment. Cancer specialists are trained in the use of radioactive treatment, whereas your physician will not be. Thyrotoxicosis is not a type of cancer.

What is radioiodine therapy?

Your hospital doctor has recommended that we treat your thyrotoxicosis with radioiodine. Iodine is absorbed by the thyroid gland, so it only takes a small dose of radioiodine to damage some of the cells. This then stops them producing the thyroid hormone, which is causing your symptoms.

We are trying to 'slow down your thyroid' so that it will work in a normal way.

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.

Where is the treatment given?

We will give you your treatment in the Medical Physics Department, also called Nuclear Medicine, at Mount Vernon Hospital.

Gate 1 is closest to this department. The easiest way in is through the main entrance of the hospital.

Once inside the main building, turn left, walk to the end of the corridor and turn left again (staying on the ground floor), then walk to the end of the long corridor where you will see the signs to the Medical Physics Department (Nuclear Medicine) on the left.

Alternatively, the automatic sliding door into the corridor to the left of the main entrance provides better access for the disabled. Through this door, turn immediately left and follow the signs as before to the Medical Physics Department.

How is treatment given?

You will be treated as an outpatient. We will give you a (tasteless) capsule of radioiodine and some water to help you swallow it, followed by a hot drink afterwards to dissolve the capsule in your stomach.

Occasionally the radioiodine will be given as a drink instead of a capsule.

Will I have to sign a consent form?

Yes, as with all medical procedures we will ask you to sign a form giving your consent for this treatment.

Therefore if you are concerned or unclear about any aspects of this treatment, please ask the team treating you, who will be very pleased to explain.

Your treatment is supervised by a cancer specialist¹ and because of this your consent form is also from the Cancer Centre.

What about pregnancy and breast-feeding?

As with all procedures involving radiation, you should not undergo treatment if you are pregnant. You must tell the staff if there is any possibility whatsoever of this being so, and you will be asked to sign a consent form to that effect. Also you must not have this treatment if you are breast-feeding.

You are advised not to become pregnant for six months following the treatment. For men who have been given radioiodine therapy, we also recommend that you do not father a child for 4 months following the treatment.

Forty years of experience in using radioiodine to treat thyrotoxicosis has shown no effect on fertility or on the subsequent health of children of patients who have had this treatment.

¹ Throughout this leaflet the term 'doctor' or 'hospital doctor' will refer to both the specialist and any doctors working within his/her team.

What must I do to prepare for treatment?

To allow the radioiodine to work, you must stop taking certain medications before treatment. Your doctor will explain this and will write it down for you. You must also follow the dietary instructions below.

Dietary instructions you must follow:

[a] For 1 week before your treatment:

Stop taking 'over the counter' medicines such as vitamin supplements, fish oil tablets and cough mixtures which contain iodine. If in doubt read the labels or check with the pharmacist.

Avoid fish, seafood, kelp (a seaweed which contains iodine), and any other products containing iodine.

[b] For 4 hours before your treatment:

It is very important that you do not eat anything for at least 4 hours before your treatment. You may drink normally.

[c] For 24 hours after your treatment:

Continue to avoid all the food/medications mentioned in [a] above.

If your hospital doctor wants you to restrict your diet for a longer period of time before your treatment, you will be told.

If any of these dietary instructions are unclear, please call us on: 01923 844081 (Mon - Fri: 8.30am - 4.30pm) and we will do our best to help you.

Are there any side-effects from this treatment?

There are not usually unpleasant side-effects from this treatment. It will not make you drowsy and you may drive afterwards. Occasionally you may get a sore throat, but this should last for only a few days. If this does happen to you, drink plenty of cool drinks which will help soothe your throat.

If the soreness in your throat lasts for more than 3 or 4 days, or if you have any other symptoms, please consult your family doctor (GP), because the radioiodine treatment may not be the cause. If you do have to visit your GP, we suggest you take this leaflet with you, which will explain the treatment we have given you.

Are there any long-term side-effects?

There are usually no unpleasant long-term effects from this radioiodine treatment. This treatment aims to stop your thyroid gland from producing too much thyroid hormone, so there is the long term possibility that the thyroid gland will become underactive and not produce enough of this hormone.

This condition is called hypothyroidism, and can be very easily managed with thyroxine tablets. This could happen within a few months or many years after your treatment. You will have regular blood tests to check the state of your thyroid. We will explain this thoroughly if it happens to you.

When will I know whether the treatment has worked?

Your treatment will work slowly over a period of weeks. You may have to go back to taking your thyroid medications for a while until the full effect of the treatment is reached, and your hospital doctor will explain this to you.

Follow-up appointments are usually given four to six weeks after your treatment. It is important that you have a follow-up appointment, so if you do not receive an appointment please contact your doctor.

Will I have more than one treatment?

Possibly. Some patients do and some do not. We will give you a standard dose that works for most patients, but occasionally the dose may have to be 'topped up' at a later date.

Will I become radioactive after the treatment?

For a short time after your treatment your thyroid will be slightly radioactive. This is quite normal, so don't worry!

There is a small risk to people around you from the radioactivity in your thyroid gland. The easiest way of dealing with this is to reduce the time you spend in close proximity to them. The restrictions that apply to you are explained in this booklet, and we will also write them down for you.

Hygiene

Most of the radioiodine goes to the thyroid gland; the rest will pass out of your body in your urine.

For 3 days:

- Drink plenty of fluids and go to the toilet often.
- Men should urinate sitting down 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.

A very small amount of the radioiodine will be in your saliva and sweat.

- Refrain from open mouth kissing and sexual intercourse for 14 days.
- Wash all your crockery and cutlery thoroughly for a few days.
- You may still prepare food for your family, but remember to wash your hands first. Bread and pastry making where you are kneading should be avoided for a few days.

When can I return to work after the treatment?

Although the treatment will not make you feel ill, you will have to stay off work for a while because of the radioactivity in your body.

If you work with children or pregnant women then this time will be increased to 3 - 4 weeks. You will be told how long you must remain away from work, and it will be written down for you.

These arrangements are made in order to be absolutely safe, and should not cause you or anybody around you any anxiety.

What about my family & contacts once I am at home?

At home you will need to take some precautionary measures in order to protect those around you, especially pregnant women and children.

The exact number of days you must take care will be written down and explained to you. During this time you must:

- Avoid sharing a bed with another person.
- Avoid close contact (closer than 1 metre) with your family or anyone else, for example, if you are watching television do not sit beside anyone – sit in a separate chair.
- Avoid places such as the cinema or restaurants where you are close to other people.
- Avoid dental appointments and (non-urgent) visits to the GP.

What about contact with children/pregnant women?

For about 3-4 weeks after your treatment you should avoid all close contact with babies, children or pregnant women; close contact means being within 1 metre, for example don't cuddle children or allow them to sit on your lap.

The exact number of days to avoid close contact will depend on the dose of radioiodine you have received and also the age of the children.

This will be explained and written down for you.

If you have small children at home, you will need to arrange for others to look after them for the appropriate length of time.

The Medical Physics department will discuss all these times and details with you. When this time has passed these restrictions will no longer apply.

What about travelling?

Public transport

For the first few days avoid journeys on public transport that take longer than 1 hour.

Private transport

You may travel by private transport. If you are travelling with someone else, ensure that you sit as far away as possible from the other person.

You must avoid travelling with the same person for more than a total of 6 hours during the 2 week period after your treatment (i.e. 1 journey of 6 hours, 3 separate journeys of 2 hours and so on).

Air travel

Journeys by air should be avoided for 4 weeks.

Please be aware that some security scanners at airports, railways stations etc. may be so sensitive that they may be able to detect that you have had radioiodine treatment months after your treatment.

When you come for your treatment you will be given a yellow sheet with details of your treatment, you should carry this with you for six months.

Can I change my appointment once made?

The answer, of course, is 'yes'. However, we have to order the radioiodine specially for you when your appointment is booked, so the hospital will still have to pay for it if there is a late cancellation.

If you have to cancel or rearrange your appointment, please tell us (if possible) at least one week before your appointment date, so that the order for your dose can be changed accordingly.

Obviously, if there are circumstances such as illnesses, which are beyond your control, we will understand.

We hope this information has been a helpful guide.

It is not intended to replace the advice given to you by your hospital doctor.

If you have any questions at all relating to this information leaflet, please call us and we will do our best to advise you.

A map of Mount Vernon Hospital can be found on the website: www.ljmc.org

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Northwood, Middlesex. HA6 2RN.

Telephone: 01923 844081

Mon - Fri: 8.30am - 4.30pm