

# Radioiodine therapy

for benign (non-cancerous)  
thyroid disease

Patient Information Series PI 14



Mount Vernon  
Cancer Centre

## **Who can I contact if I have questions?**

If you have any questions please contact the Nuclear Medicine Department.

**Nuclear Medicine Department: 020 3826 2263**

Mon–Fri: 8.30am–4.30pm

Mount Vernon Cancer Centre is at:  
Mount Vernon Hospital, Rickmansworth Road,  
Northwood, Middlesex HA6 2RN

A map of Mount Vernon Hospital can be found on the website:  
[www.ljmc.org](http://www.ljmc.org)

For more information see the leaflet: Getting to Mount Vernon Hospital (HHC232) available on the website.

# Radioiodine therapy for benign (non cancerous) thyroid disease

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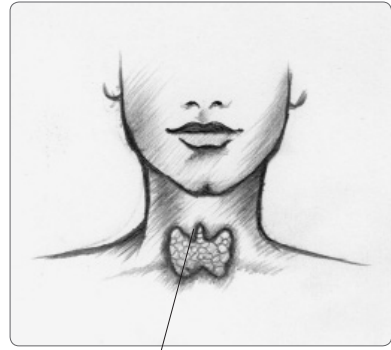
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## Introduction

This leaflet is written for patients having radioiodine treatment for an overactive thyroid gland (thyrotoxicosis), toxic nodule or euthyroid goitre.

Thyrotoxicosis is a disorder of the thyroid gland in the neck. This can affect both men and women and causes over-production of thyroid hormones. One way of treating this condition is by using radioactive iodine (radioiodine).



thyroid gland

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This treatment may be under the control of a cancer specialist. This is because it uses a radioactive form of treatment. Cancer specialists are trained in the use of radioactive treatment, whereas your physician may not be.

Thyrotoxicosis, toxic nodule or euthyroid goitre are not types of cancer.

## What is radioiodine therapy?

Your thyroid specialist has recommended that we treat you with radioiodine. Iodine is absorbed by the thyroid gland. The radiation from radioiodine targets some of the cells in the thyroid gland which stops them producing the thyroid hormone.

The aim of the treatment is to 'slow down your thyroid gland' so that it stops it being over-active or to reduce the size of the thyroid/goitre.

## **Pre-treatment telephone call**

About two weeks before your treatment, you will receive a telephone call from a member of the Nuclear Medicine Department. They will discuss the treatment and any restrictions with you and you will be able to ask any questions.

## **Where is the treatment given?**

We will give you your treatment in the Nuclear Medicine Department at Mount Vernon Hospital.

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

Once inside the main building, turn left just before the Oak Tree Restaurant, 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 Nuclear Medicine Department on the left.

Alternatively you can use the automatic sliding door into the corridor, which is to the left of the main entrance. This gives better access for people with mobility difficulties. Through this door, turn left and follow the signs to the Nuclear Medicine Department.

## **How is treatment given?**

You will be treated as an outpatient. We will give you a capsule containing radioiodine with some water to help you swallow it, followed by a hot drink to dissolve the capsule in your stomach.

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

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.

## **Will I have to sign a consent form?**

As with all medical procedures we will ask you to sign a form giving your consent to this treatment.

If you are worried or unclear about any aspects of this treatment, please ask the team treating you. They will be pleased to answer your questions.

Because your treatment is given at Mount Vernon Hospital a standard Cancer Centre consent form is used, although you do not have cancer.

## **What about pregnancy, breast-feeding and fathering a child?**

As with all procedures involving radiation, you should not undergo treatment if you are pregnant. You must tell the staff if there is any chance of you being pregnant. You will be asked to sign a declaration to that effect.

You must not have this treatment if you are breast-feeding.

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

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

## **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 on the next page.

## **Dietary instructions you must follow:**

[a] For **one 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 **four hours** before your treatment:

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

[c] For **24 hours** after your treatment:

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

If your doctor wants you to restrict your diet for a longer period of time before your treatment, they will tell you.

If any of these dietary instructions are unclear, contact the Nuclear Medicine Department (contact details are on page 2) and they will help you.

## **Are there any side effects from this treatment?**

Most people do not have any unpleasant side effects from this treatment. It will not make you drowsy and you may drive afterwards. Sometimes you may get a sore throat, but this should last for only a few days. If this does happen, drink plenty of cool drinks which will help soothe your throat.

If the soreness in your throat lasts for more than three or four days or if you have any other symptoms, please consult your family doctor (GP). This is because the radioiodine treatment may not be the cause. If you do visit your GP, please take this leaflet with you and your yellow sheet with details of your treatment.

There is a small chance that some patients with thyrotoxicosis will be made worse for a short time after having radioactive iodine. If this happens to you it is very important that you discuss this with your hospital doctor. This effect is only temporary.

## **Are there any long-term side effects?**

Most people do not have any unpleasant long-term effects from this radioiodine treatment. This treatment aims to stop your thyroid gland from producing too much thyroid hormone.

You will have regular blood tests to check your thyroid function. Your first blood test will be 4–6 weeks of having the treatment.

It is likely that the thyroid gland will become underactive and not produce enough of the thyroid hormone. This condition is called hypothyroidism, and can be very easily managed with thyroxine tablets. This will usually happen within a few months. It is usually found early without the development of symptoms. It may however develop some years after your treatment.



## **When will I know if the treatment has worked?**

Your treatment will work slowly over a period of weeks. You may have to go back to taking your thyroid medication for a while until the treatment has the full effect. 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. If you do not receive an appointment please contact your hospital doctor.

## **Will I have more than one treatment?**

We give a standard dose that works for most people, but for some people the dose may have to be 'topped up' at a later date.

## **Will I be 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 being near to them. The restrictions that apply to you are explained in this booklet. This will also be written 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 three days:

- drink plenty of fluids and don't allow your bladder to get too full
- men should urinate sitting down to avoid getting urine containing radioiodine on the edge of the toilet
- after going to the toilet, put the lid down and 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. Remember:

- do not engage in any sexual activities or open mouth kissing for 14 days
- make sure all the crockery and cutlery you use is well washed for a few days
- you may still prepare food for your family, but remember to wash your hands first. You should avoid making bread and pastry for a few days. This is because of having to knead and touch the food.

## 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 three to four weeks. You will be told how long you must remain away from work, and it will be written down for you. This is to make sure that you and anybody near you are safe.

## **What about my family and contacts once I am at home?**

At home you will need to take some measures to protect those around you.

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

- avoid close contact (closer than one 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 sharing a bed with another person
- avoid places such as the cinema or restaurants where you are close to other people
- avoid (non-urgent) dental appointments and (non-urgent) visits to the GP
- do not stay in a hotel or boarding house as there may be pregnant women and children present

## **What about contact with children/pregnant women?**

For about three to four weeks after your treatment you should avoid all close contact with babies, children or pregnant women; close contact means being within one 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. 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 required length of time.

The Nuclear Medicine 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 one 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 six hours during the two week period after your treatment (i.e. one journey of six hours, three separate journeys of two hours and so on).

### **Air travel**

Journeys by air should be avoided for four weeks.

Please be aware that some security scanners at airports and railways stations may be so sensitive that they may 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?**

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 at least one week before your appointment date. This is so that the order for your radioiodine can be changed.

We understand if there are situations that arise at short notice, such as illnesses which are beyond your control.

We hope this information has been helpful.

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 advise you.

## **Other help and support**

People often say that, during their illness, they experience a range of emotions. Many find it to be a stressful, anxious and confusing time.

If you have any questions or concerns about your treatment, are struggling to cope or need some support, please visit the Lynda Jackson Macmillan Centre (LJMC). Please feel free to drop in before, during or after any of your visits to the Cancer Centre.

The team at the LJMC works as part of the overall team caring for you to provide help, support and information in a relaxed setting to help you cope better with your treatment. Your family and friends are also welcome to visit the centre or call the Helpline.

You do not need an appointment to visit the LJMC which is located next to the Chemotherapy Suite by Gate 3. If you are unable to get to the LJMC, you can call the Helpline on 020 3826 2555.

Please see the back page of this leaflet for more information.

This publication has been produced by the Information team at Mount Vernon Cancer Centre. Contributors include health professionals, patients and carers who have expertise and experience in the topics covered by this publication. All our publications are reviewed and updated regularly. If you would like any details of the references used to write this information please contact the Information team on 020 3826 2555.

