About Your Radioiodine Treatment

What is radioiodine treatment?

Radioiodine (or Iodine-131) is a radioactive capsule you swallow to treat thyroid problems or cancer. The capsule gives off radiation that is absorbed by your thyroid and cancer cells. The radioiodine helps destroy cancer and stops its growth.

Is it safe?

This is a safe and effective treatment. Radioiodine only stays in your body for a short time:

- Most of the radioiodine will pass out of your body in your urine in the first few days after treatment.
- A smaller amount will leave your body through saliva, sweat and bowel movements over the next seven to 10 days.
- The radioiodine that was absorbed into thyroid tissue or other cells will disappear naturally over several weeks.

While the radioiodine is in your body, you will expose others to a small amount of radiation (similar to medical or dental X-rays). Limit your contact with other people and pets for 3 to 5 days.

- Some patients must stay in the hospital while their radiation levels are strongest.
- Others may be able to isolate themselves at home.

Before your radioiodine treatment

We will let you know if you need to stop taking certain medicines (especially thyroid medicine), reschedule radiology exams or follow a low iodine diet before your treatment.

You will need to:

- Stop breastfeeding at least 8 weeks before treatment. Please ask your doctor if you have questions about this. **You will not be able to restart breastfeeding your current baby.** Radioiodine can permanently damage your baby’s thyroid gland. (It will be safe to breastfeed future children.)
- Tell your doctor:
  - If you *are* pregnant or *could be* pregnant. **You cannot have this treatment if you are pregnant.**
  - If you are planning to become pregnant. We first need to be sure you do not need more treatment. Your doctor will tell you how long to wait (usually at least 6 months).
- Tell us if you are not able to drive yourself home after treatment.
Day of treatment

- You may eat a light breakfast on the day you are scheduled to receive the radioiodine treatment.
- We will discuss your treatment plan and answer your questions.
- You will swallow one or more capsules.
- If you are having a scan: You will lie on a table wearing a hospital gown. We will scan your body from head to toe with a special camera. It will take about 45 minutes. The scan will show any tissue or tumor that should be treated with a larger dose of radioiodine.
- We will give you a card describing your treatment. You can present the card if you set off a radiation alarm. This may happen at places with high security (airport, border crossings, government buildings, hospitals or waste disposal sites) for up to 3 months.

After treatment

- You may not eat or drink anything for at least one hour after swallowing the capsules.
- Drive straight home after treatment—do not run errands. It is okay to get a ride home from others. Keep as much distance as possible between you and the other passengers.
- Drink 6 to 8 eight-ounce glasses of liquids, such as water or juice. This will make you urinate more often, so the radioiodine will leave your body faster. This will also help you stay hydrated.
- Start sucking on sour candy 24 hours after treatment (but not earlier). Continue for one day. This will help reduce any sore throat and neck pain.

Keeping others safe

- You will need to follow the directions below for:
  - 3 days (if your dose was 75 mCi or less).
  - 5 days (if you had a dose over 75 mCi).
- Kids under 2 and pregnant household members should stay elsewhere.
- Avoid public transportation.
- Limit personal automobile travel with others to only 2 to 4 hours per day. Keep as much distance as possible between you and the other passengers.
- Sleep in a separate room following treatment. (You are not allowed to stay in a hotel/motel).
- Arrange to have sole use of a bathroom for the first 3 days (no one else can use this bathroom).
- Flush the toilet 2 to 3 times after each use. Men should sit on the toilet when urinating to decrease splashing.
- Wash your hands often and well, especially after using the toilet. Use plenty of soap and water.
- Rinse the bathroom sink and tub well after using.
- Avoid close contact with others. Stay 1 meter away (approximately 3 feet). This means:
  - no kissing
  - no sexual intercourse
  - no crowded places, such as stores, movie theaters and restaurants
- Do not share cups, glasses, plates or eating utensils. Wash items promptly after use (do not use disposable dishes).
- Do not share towels or washcloths. Wash them separately from your family’s laundry.
For patients staying in the hospital

Hospitalization after radioiodine treatment usually lasts only 24 hours, while your radiation levels are the highest.

To minimize radiation exposure in others:

- You will be admitted to a private room with a radiation caution sign on the door.
- Protective plastic will be on the floor and around most items in your room.
- You will need to stay in your room until your radiation has decreased to a safe level. To help pass the time, we suggest bringing magazines or other disposable items to the hospital. Do not bring anything you cannot throw away when you leave. Do not bring valuables.
- Your urine will be collected in a special container.
- Eating utensils will be disposable.
- Collected trash will remain in your room, so we can check the radiation levels.
- Your care providers will wear gloves and shoe covers. The time spent in your room will be limited, but your needs will be met.
- Visitors will only be allowed in special circumstances if approved by your doctor. They must be at least 18 years old, not pregnant and must:
  - Only stay a maximum of 30 minutes a day
  - Wear gloves and shoe covers in the room
  - Sit no closer than six feet from you
  - Not handle anything in the room.

You will be discharged when your radiation level is low.

You will have a second body scan 5 to 10 days after discharge. This scan will show if there is any spread (metastasis) of your thyroid cancer.